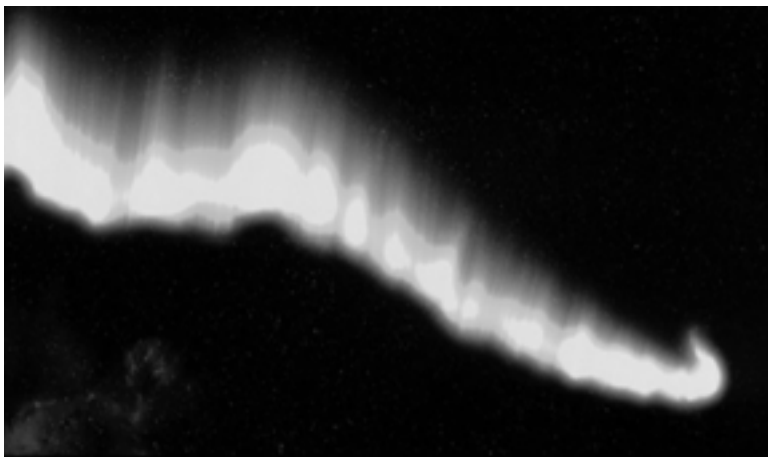
Vivian Sobchack

When the Ear Dreams

Dolby Digital and the Imagination of Sound



Dolby's "Aurora"

> What a fine ear this poet has! And what mastery in directing the play of the dream devices known to us as seeing and hearing, the ultra-seeing and ultra-hearing, hearing oneself seeing . . . hear[ing] ourselves listen.
>
> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

In what follows, I want to explore the reverberations and reversals of seeing and hearing suggested by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space,* particularly as these might resonate in the current cinematic moment. A phenomenological investigation of the poetic *image* as it emerges and (to use his term) "reverberates" in literary experience and enables the reader to inhabit various "day dreams" of felicitous space, Bachelard's study only occasionally addresses the poetics of *sound*. Here, then, although also pursuing the "dream devices" of seeing and hearing, I propose to turn the primary *visual* premise of Bachelard's poetics of image literally (or, more precisely, sonically) on its *ear.* This should be of particular interest to our contemporary and digitized moving image culture in which general, if historical, assumptions about the phenomenology of image-sound relationships and "seeing" and "hearing" in the cinema have become less certain, if not completely reversed. Whereas it was once a given that vision was the dominant and most nuanced (and hence poetic) element of cinematic experience, of late that dominance has been challenged by shifts of emphasis and attention in both sound technology and our sensorium. Thus Don Ihde writes in *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound*: "Our capacities for listening are changed by technological culture. . . . We have learned to listen farther, . . . extended our range of hearing, . . . [and] made technologically produced sound pervasive."[1]

Bringing together both digital sound technology and computer graphics in new forms of "ultra-hearing" and "ultra-seeing" (I've reversed Bachelard's sensory hierarchy), the films I want to investigate are eccentric to feature-length narrative cinema, even as they ultimately tell us something significant about its contemporary configuration and aesthetic tendencies.

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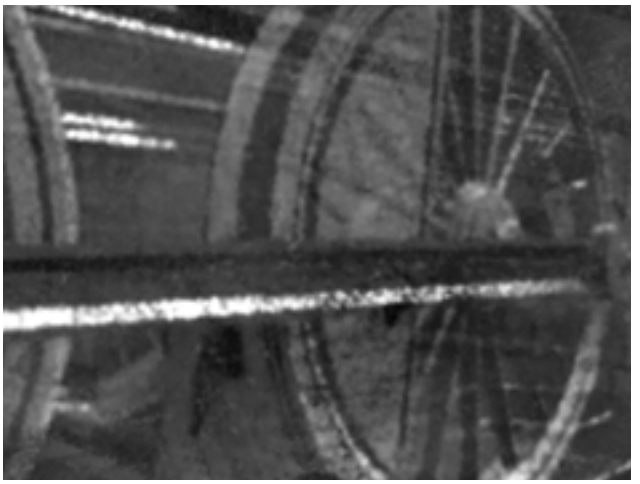
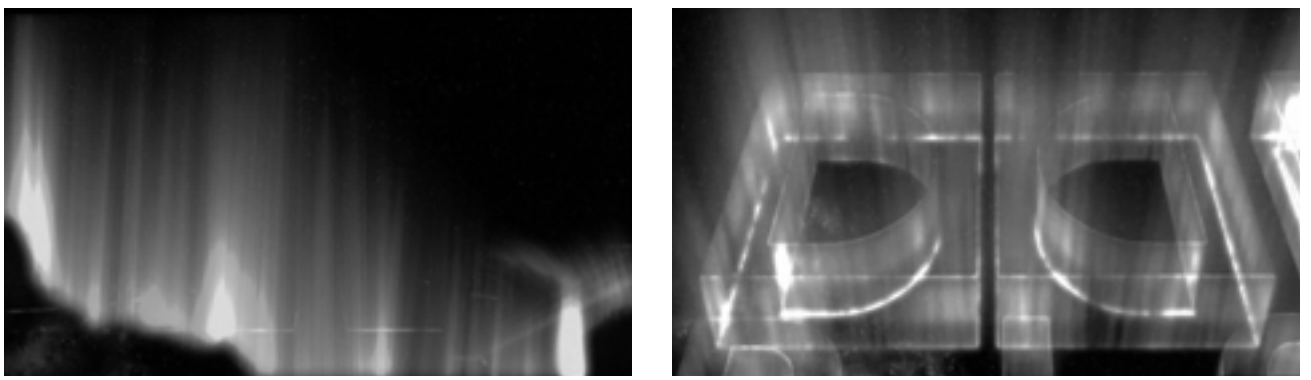
Although eccentric, however, these films are also quite familiar to most of us, appearing regularly in movie theaters all over the United States (as well as in certain locations abroad). Specifically, these are the short theatrical "trailers" produced by Dolby Digital Sound to display—and promote—their sound systems through a purposefully poetic exploration of the relations of sound and image. Created precisely as acts and representations of "ultra-hearing" and "ultra-seeing," the trailers are particularly compelling in that they not only condense but also allegorize this exaggeration of sensory experience in the space-time of rarely more (and sometimes less) than 30 seconds each.[2] Thus the Dolby trailers are purposefully oneiric—"dream devices" that constitute both an intimate and immense poetic space in which one can wonder at, as Bachelard puts it, "hearing oneself seeing . . . hear[ing] ourselves listen."[3]

There have been, to date, nine Dolby promotional sound trailers (all of which I shall describe in some detail a bit later). The first were made in the mid-1990s and the last in 2003, this after a four-year production hiatus. Some have been digitally updated and reissued and play in theaters today; others have disappeared from theatrical view; and six have now become available on DVD for testing—and celebrating—the sound systems of an ever-increasing number of "home theaters." Dolby's promotional literature and ancillary reviews tell us that the trailers "combine stunning computer graphics with state-of-the-art soundtracks," "show off the multichannel format," "keep everything [sonic] clean and unmuddied," "help exhibitors take full promotional advantage of the name most widely associated by audiences with high-quality film sound," and, perhaps most interesting from both a rhetorical and poetic perspective, "open people's ears in a new way."[4]



Dolby's "Train"

We might say that what is projected in the literature—and in the theater—is a felicitous and constitutive space for, as Bachelard puts it, "an ear that knows how to dream."[5] Thus, the Dolby trailers should be of special interest to those of us who want to focus on the poetics of sound-image/image-sound relations in the contemporary cinematic experience. Made to foreground sound (as well as to corporately shape it), the trailers exist as an extreme and contemporary distillation of (to paraphrase Bachelard) "the sonority of [cinematic] being."[6] That is, they offer a kind of historically and culturally qualified phenomenological reduction or "thematization" of sound not only as it is realized in actual cinematic practice, but also as it is conceived in contemporary digitized cinematic culture.[7] Furthermore, insofar as these trailers need to fill the screen with images as they fill the theater with sound, they do so abstracted from the auditory constraints and acoustic conventions of feature-length narrative.



"Aurora"

Taken together as a group, the trailers thus offer up an "audio-vision" (to use Michel Chion's terminology) not only of how sound phenomenologically is given to and is perceived in contemporary cinematic experience but also, and more interestingly, how that "acousmatic" perception (in which cinematic sound is heard without its originating cause being seen onscreen) is rendered graphically as a visible appearance.[8] Indeed, the desire to mark *sound as visible* rather than the *visible as sounding* provides the main impetus for and function of the Dolby trailers. In all but the most recent of them, sound originates, dominates, and shapes the image, rather than the image dominating and grounding (or anchoring) the sound. This phenomenological—and cinematic—"turn to the *auditory dimension*," as Ihde writes, is

> potentially more than a simple changing of [the relations among] variables. It begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional double reduction of vision (first "to" vision, then "of" vision) as the main variable and metaphor.

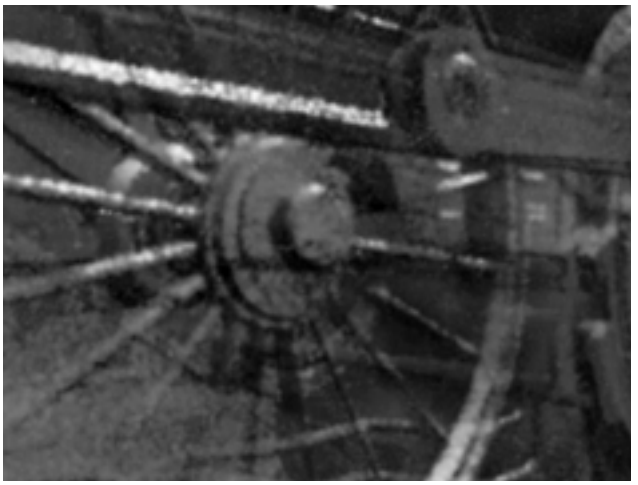
Furthermore, he not only points out that within a "visualist tradition" it is extremely difficult to attend to listening, but also emphasizes that, indeed, "*It is to the invisible that listening may attend*."[9] The paradox of the Dolby trailers is that—as *cinema*—they must promote an attention to listening not only by sounding the invisible but also by visualizing it. In this regard, the invisible (and offscreen) "acousmatic imagination" of the Dolby trailers provides a compelling and compressed onscreen visual glossary of what are acoustically perceived to be sound shapes, sound aspects, and sound effects. (Indeed, as I first watched them, I distinctly remember wondering: "How does sound look?")

But let us, for the moment, put sound "out of the picture"—and, since this is cinema we are exploring, let us begin (as we have from the beginning) with the concrete image of a train slowly chugging its diagonal way across the screen before us. This cinematic train, however, is *not* the legendary one that arrived at the Paris Grand Café on the night of December 5, 1895, to cause its audience apocryphal panic and also trouble Maxim Gorky into writing of the event:

> It is terrifying to see, but it is the movement of shadows, only of shadows. . . . Suddenly something clicks, everything vanishes and a train appears on the screen. It speeds straight at you—watch out! It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you into a rippled sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones, and crushing into dust and into broken fragments this hall and this building. . . . But this, too, is a train of shadows.[10]

While also a "train of shadows," the cinematic train I want to foreground here is a more contemporary vehicle, for all its nostalgic and old-fashioned look, and appears in one of the first and most memorable of the Dolby Digital promotional trailers. Its appearance on the screen is, like Lumière's train, extremely brief and discrete, and constitutes the entirety of the film—however, despite similarities to its earlier forebear, this train purposefully chugs its way across the screen in a dynamic movement that runs quite literally *counter* (both in cinematic direction and function) to that of Lumière's awesome engine.

For one thing, Lumière's train was perceptibly silent. As an image, it could only be *visually* reverberant for its audience, its chuffing and chugging only *virtually* resonant—the image the source of the sound that resonated not in the theater but in the acoustic imagination of its viewers. Certainly, as we know full well from our rich sensory experience of silent cinema, this imaginative evocation of "sonorous being" is no small accomplishment by the image. Thus, when Bachelard asks, in particular relation to the poetic image, "Then how shall we see without hearing?," he responds that we cannot do so—and points to the synaesthetic experience that phenomenologically informs visuality with something more than mere visi-



The ghostly train dissolves.

bility: "There exist complicated forms which, even when they are at rest, make a noise. Twisted things continue to make creaking contortions."[11] Here, *the objective eye subjectively imagines sound*.

Dolby's "Train" is of another sort than Lumière's, however. It emerges not as an objectively silent image that generates sound only in the subjective imagination but, rather, as a subjectively resonant image generated by, and from, objective sound. Here, *the objective ear subjectively imagines the image*. That is, Dolby's "train of shadows" (often called "Ghost Train") comes into visible being on the screen in a temporalized, reverberant, and echoed response to an inaugural sounding-out that calls the image forth in the formal vagueness of something much like a dream or memory. Thus, while this train, like Lumière's, has an extraordinary and poetic intensity of "presence," it is less visually generated than sonically generated. Indeed, visually, this train is even more "shadowy" than Lumière's: it never quite resolves into a coherent image, a clear image, a fulsome image, or a fixed image. Rather, it exists visibly as something of an irresolute "abstraction"—without as much visible "body" as the Lumière train, without a comparable station, without passengers, and without any trace of a surrounding and contextualizing world. And thus abstracted, it figures against, and almost blends into (as Ihde describes the visual field of our imagination and memory), a "background of almost undiscernable color and extension," one that is vague, indefinite, and visibly latent or "implicit."[12]

As well, unlike Lumière's train, this ghostly engine's strained but powerful trajectory accelerates (if one can even call it that) not toward us in a threatened plunge into the darkened space in which we sit, but away from us—its great and effortful wheels chugging off into an irresolute space where it slowly dissolves into the semblance of film grain and amorphous grayish smoke from which it seemed to emerge. Furthermore, given its mythology, as it was phenomenologically perceived to "suddenly" bear down on and threaten its viewers, Lumière's train not only arrived at the station "on time" but also arrived "too soon"—whereas the Dolby train seems always to have arrived on screen "too late," a visual echo delayed in its visible being as the trailing and fleeting "after-image" of the distant, thin, and evocative sounding of a stationmaster's timpani announcing the very departure that called it into existence. Indeed, half-hidden in the shadowy grain of the image, there are a series of faint superimpositions—visual echoes—as if the great wheels were trying to temporally "catch up" with themselves and their sounding before they completely dissipated.[13]

Let us return to that sounding—and to the attentive listening it provokes. Throughout, and always in temporal motion and dynamic modulation, is the "sonorous being" of this irresolute and nostalgic train—massive to the ear and in screen size but visibly weightless, fading away and away from us as an image even as it comes into imaginative realization. As an imaginative figment—or figure—that image first emerges from the aforementioned thinnest of dream sounds unattached to the dark screen before us: a high frequency and faint "tin-tin-tin" that, in its rhythm and pitch, gives us the merest suggestion of historically imagined departure soundings in old train stations. Then, for the briefest moment, there is a silence born of expectation—followed by the hiss of what sounds like steam and the almost simultaneous grinding of metal against metal, both sonically resolving into the heightened and intense acoustic presence of the "starting up" of an imagined steam engine. It is only then that the image emerges inaugurally from the darkness and amorphous and grayish forms that hint at—but do not become—smoke. Rather, these forms tentatively resolve into a discernable but "grainy" train engine—this in response to the sounds that audibly gather in texture and palpability to become a sonorous, highly amplified, and invisible admixture of steam, clanging metal, and sonic whines sensible as the resistances of great mass and weight. These soundings are then temporalized in an effortful chugging—their increasing acceleration and sonic mass also the very onset of their extensible fading away into a reverberant last note.

Here, what Bachelard writes of the poetic image, we might apply to this poetic sounding. From those first distant and tinny notes (for they are notes as much as they are noises):

> Murmur and clangor go hand in hand. We are taught the ontology of presentiment. In this tense state of fore-hearing, we are asked to become aware of the slightest indications, and . . . things are indications before they are phenomena; the weaker the indication, the greater the significance, since it indicates an origin.[14]

With our contemporary train, what we have is first this "fore-hearing"—and, in that brief moment of expectant silence and presentiment before the image emerges, we are indeed "asked to become aware of

the slightest indications" that foretell its visibility. Indeed, as a figure emergent from and within the film's intensified soundings but never fully resolved, the train exists throughout tenuously—more as an "indication" of a train than as a phenomenal "thing." However, as Bachelard suggests, this very *lack* of resolution—the phenomenal "weakness" of the visible image—lends it greater poetic significance and points to an "origin." That origin, however, is elsewhere—neither on the screen nor in the image. Finally, then, the only material presence, however insubstantial, that actually—and palpably—enters and fills the space of the theater audience is not the imaged train but the resolution, realization, and amplified resonance of its imagined sound. A "vibrating sonorous world" emerges—and, as Bachelard suggests,

> Here to "fill up" and "plenitude" [have] a completely different sense. It is not a material object that fills another by espousing the form that the other imposes. No, it is the dynamism of sonorous life itself which . . . fills the . . . space, or better, the . . . world it assigns itself by its movement, making it reverberate, breathing into it its own life.[15]

It bears emphasis that these sonic reverberations neither "animate" nor "thicken" the image *as it has already been formed and given* but, instead, *cause* the image—calling it forth into visible, if tenuous, temporal being. Thus, in this context, we might quarrel with Bachelard when he writes: "Very often, it is in the opposite of causality, that is, in reverberation, . . . that I think we find the real measure of the being of a poetic image. In this reverberation, the poetic image will have a sonority of being."[16] Indeed, Bachelard's opposition between causality and reverberation seems undone in "Train," in which the sonority of being is *a priori* and causes, takes precedence over, and serves as the "measure" of the visible poetic image. Less undone, however, than sensually reversed, the motivating "poetic image" here is not an image at all; it is the temporalized and reverberant "poetic sound." "Sonority of being," in this instance, emerges from the "reverberations" of an objective sounding—paradoxically inviting us, as Bachelard suggests, "to go beyond the auditory threshold, to hear with our imagination," yet this in a way very different from that solicited by Lumière's silent train.[17] Seated in the audience, we find our listening activated not merely by our own imaginations but also—and acousmatically—by the auditory imagination of an "other": by an unseen "ear that knows how to dream."[18] What that ear dreams is the visible image—and, as Bachelard notes, "What a fine ear this poet has! And what mastery in directing the play of the dream devices known to us as seeing and hearing."[19] Thus, "Train" ends with the self-promotion of its "fine ear," of its sensory "mastery." Indeed, once the train dissolves into grain, and the grain into the faintest trace of smoke against the dark screen, the company logo emerges into visibility, shimmering first as if reflecting the gray smoke, and then resolving into what became the trailers' typical shimmering gold graphic: opposing and doubled "Ds" next to the boxed text "Dolby," both set above the word "Digital."

Resounding with the earliest and most silent of films while promoting the latest and loudest, "Train" may be the most cinematically—and poetically—reverberant of the Dolby trailers. Nonetheless, it is not unique, and shares visual characteristics and auditory effects found in nearly all of them. Thus, at this point, I want to indicate what can be only "traces" of the other trailers—beginning, because of its anomalous status, with the last one made, titled "Stomp" in reference to the dance troupe that appears in it. "Stomp" is the only Dolby trailer that is not computer-graphically rendered (if computer-graphically enhanced). In this regard, however sonically energetic and acoustically engaging, "Stomp" constitutes sound-image relations that are quite different from its forebears. Firstly, using atypical live-action cinematography, the trailer anchors sound to the image much more conventionally, emphasizing their "syncretism"—that "spontaneous and irresistible" relationship of audio-visual simultaneity that Chion sees as a gestalt "weld" of sound and image.[20] Secondly, "Stomp" has a much higher proportion of "synch points" ("salient" and "promi-

Dolby emerges from the fog of its "Train."

"Egypt"

"Canyon"

nent" moments of audio-visual synchrony) than do the earlier trailers, so that sounds (such as metallic banging and clanging) are firmly attached in a logically causal—and conventionally "realistic"—relation to the image's specificity (such as showing dancers banging garbage can lids together).[21] Thus, although sound is certainly foregrounded in "Stomp" (particularly percussive sound), it is not as acousmatically imaginative and generative as it is in the other trailers; rather, it appears generated from the physical action of the dancers seen on the screen instead of being their inaugural and driving force.[22]

In addition to "Train" and "Stomp," the trailers are all titled by Dolby in the most general terms: "Egypt," which sinuously and slowly moves to music through the dark and columned interior of a vaguely ancient, empty, and Orientalized building toward a sunlit aperture on a far wall; "Rain" (sometimes called "Digital Rain"), which gives us abstract variations of water droplets and puddles accompanied by sounds that convey crystal glass and are produced by an instrument called the "waterphone"; "City" (also called "Broadway"), which, to the sound of rotor blades and heavy bass, has a helicopter diving and zooming in close-up through a neon-lit, chiaroscuro urban setting that features a movie theater; "Temple," which slowly moves inward and upward along the steps and toward the columns of an ersatz Greco-Roman ruin to sounds meant to echo the empty space; "Aurora," which presents a wavy and multi-colored curtain of light to swelling choral music; "Canyon," which, to syncopated rhythms, faint animal cries, and the sound of wind, moves us fast and low through dark rock formations and then rises toward a rim of blue sky; and "Game," which, to mechanical noises of revved-up vehicles, gives us computergraphic grids and digital game figures chasing and zapping each other in game cycles and helicopters.

Given this quick gloss, how might we begin to describe more phenomenologically the Dolby trailers as a group—particularly insofar as the reverberations of their "sonority of being" are heard and seen to imaginatively cause or produce their visible images? I emphasize here the "imaginative" production of images because (with the exception of "Stomp") the three most apparent features of the trailers are, first, that sound calls the images into being rather than emanating from them and then continues to lead them throughout; second, that the images are in constant movement and visible "fluctuation"; and third, that, in concert with their digitized sound, the images are computer-graphically "rendered" rather than photographically "reproduced."

In this regard, Bachelard points to "poets [who] often introduce us into a world of *impossible* sounds,"[23] and tells us that "it would be quite superfluous for such images to be true. They exist. They possess . . . absoluteness."[24] In the trailers, this imaginative "absoluteness" emerges not only from the paradox of hearing sounds that are impossible but also from the trailers' general *abstraction* and visual *virtuality*—both these qualities generating the phenomenological sense that despite their detail (or perhaps because of it) and constant kinetic movement (or perhaps because of it), *they do not exist in space as such*. That is, the trailers appear as "pure" image and seem to have no weight, no existential thickness, no "world." Indeed, their visible reverberations visually *echo*—neither "in synch" with nor having the palpable force of—the very qualities of the sound that inaugurates and sustains them, the sound in the theater (rather than on the screen) that, by contrast, seems more materialized, more concrete, and more present to our experience than what we see.

We might suggest that these images, however visually compelling in the moment, affirm themselves as

"rendered" by sound—not only computer-graphically but also in the sense of Chion's distinction between sound "reproduced" and "rendered," this latter defined against realism as sonically conveying or expressing the feelings or effects associated affectively with the situation on screen.[25] Here the affective "situation" is offscreen, its sonorous feelings conveyed as the *visual effects* of its sounding (and not the reverse). In this regard, it is worth noting that taken solely as the kinetic display of computer-graphic imagery, the trailers are hardly groundbreaking. We've all seen the light shows, the zooming, humanly impossible, ersatz camera movements, the quasi-atmospheric yet sharp-edged chiaroscuro many times before. Thus, the trailers are exciting to watch and often applauded by audiences less for their computer-graphic bravura than for their primary function of visibly articulating sound—and, more importantly, of visibly imagining and articulating *sound as such*.

But before we look at this visible articulation of "sound as such" (and what such a phrasing might mean), we need to hear and describe the acousmatic sounds and soundings that inform them. Except again for "Stomp," in which the emergence of both sound and image are highly synchronized, all the trailers begin only with sound and a darkened screen. All are significantly amplified and acoustically "unmuddied" and bear only metaphoric relation to sound as we normatively engage it in daily life—(at least when we are unattached to contemporary devices such as the Walkman and Ipod). In most of the trailers, music and sound effects are combined and synthesized so that it is difficult to tell them apart—yet, equally often, "special" sound effects are heard as particularly discrete and isolated so as to show off the multi-channel format that uses all of the six speakers placed around the theater. (In "Canyon," for example, a sound almost like wings fluttering is foregrounded before, during, and after an "almost image" of something flying that flits too rapidly across the screen to be clearly "figured out," and the sound of "wind" is particularly exaggerated at the trailer's end.) Furthermore, all the trailers (including "Stomp") create ongoing contrasts between deep thrumming bass and tinkling high frequency sounds. Music and sound effects also tend to be syncopated, with dramatic percussive background notes emphasized: drums, cymbals, bells, tuned crystal glass and, in the high frequency range, violins. In some of the trailers—such as "Egypt" and "Canyon"—the music's rhythms mark it as exotically non-Western. Yet mechanical noises and "electronic" sound effects are prominent and discrete even in these more "lyrical" trailers, where they stand in for "natural" sounds such as water, wind, and bird or animal calls. These mechanical and electronic sounds are particularly foregrounded and fill the soundscape not only in "Train" but also in "City," and in "Game," in which we hear the sonic "rendering" of helicopter blades and the simulated whizzing and zapping of computer-graphic vehicles. Also, in almost all of the trailers, there are frequent "tinkling" sounds in the high register, and the majority end with an "upswelling" of sound that then "fades away"—indeed, this sound dynamic constitutes the entirety of the early "Aurora" trailer (recently enhanced and re-released for theatrical exhibition).

Dolby writes itself into the walls of the canyon.

Throughout, emphasis is on sound emergent, moving, swelling, and fading, on sounds separated, spatialized, and amplified to create an intensified sense of acoustical presence and sonic immersion. Nonetheless, from a phenomenological perspective, "immersion" needs to be qualified here. Despite the emergence, swelling, and fading, and despite what can only be called the frequent "simulation" of echoes and reverberation, this is not the phenomenological sound of the concert hall that one feels is palpably filled with—and inhabited by—the plenitude of a sound gestalt in which one is immersed with others. With the trailers, sound certainly seems palpable—this, very much a function of amplification.[26] At the same time, however, it also seems *contained,* indeed *framed*.[27] That is, while the amplified, swelling sounds fill what seems like a vast space, that space seems nonetheless discrete, and doesn't precisely coincide with—even as it intersects with—the actual space of the theater in which we sit. The space of the sounding, particularly in its discrete elements, seems "deep" with a depth that has no discernable parameters and yet its breadth seems to have sharply defined edges and seems absolutely bounded in its clarity, its lack of sonic "leakage." Furthermore, foregrounded in

"City/Broadway"

their clarity, the more isolated sounds and effects move from place to place (and speaker to speaker) around the listener and the theater but don't so much "fill up" the space continuously as "describe" it in a kind of discontinuous "mapping."

In *Audio-Vision,* Chion considers the sound qualities of these promotional trailers—albeit very generally and briefly, and with specific reference to THX and its "quality control"-driven "regulation" of theatrical sound delivery.[28] In terms of their promotional trailers, however, (albeit their different kinds of visual imagination), the sound qualities of THX and Dolby are similar—both creating, as Chion puts it, "a *superfield,* a general spatial continuum,"[29] in which the screen is only one element in a much broader spatial field. After describing THX's trademark upswelling "Deep Note"—30 seconds of "a bunch of glissandi falling toward the low bass register, spiraling spatially across the room from speaker to speaker, ending triumphantly on an enormous chord"[30]—Chion goes on to note that, along with their "overwhelming volume," two characteristics of such trailers "typify current taste":

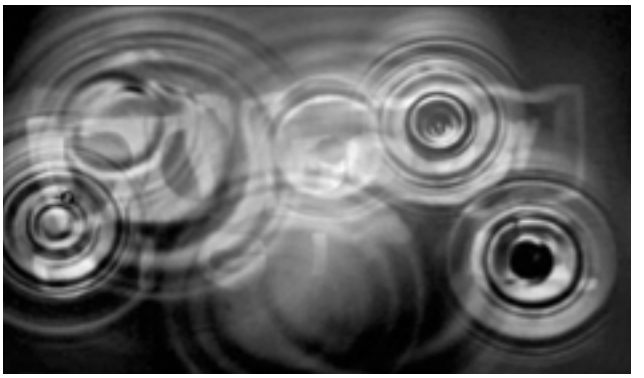
> First, the bass sound that the glissando ends on is *clean of all distortion and secondary vibrations.* . . . What the demo short is doing . . . is showing off the technical capacity to *isolate* and *purify* the sound ingredients. Second, one feels *no trace . . . of the reverberation* that normally accompanies . . . loud sounds in an enclosed space. . . . The sound event remains as *clear* and *distinct* as if we heard it on . . . a compact home stereo. . . . The real size of the auditorium is immaterial, *amplification no longer has a true scale of reference*.[31]

Chion is not kind to today's digitized theatrical sound systems, and certainly would seem to challenge my emphasis here on the Dolby trailers' poetic "reverberation"—indeed, on digital reverberation of any kind.[32] His descriptions are damning—if, from an objective acoustical perspective, accurate. Initially summarizing the characteristics of Dolby and THX, he points to their "stable sound, extremely well defined in high frequencies, powerful in volume, with superb dynamic contrasts, and also, despite its strength and the probably large theater space, a sound that does not seem reverberant at all." But then he continues

> New movie houses . . . have indeed mercilessly vanquished reverb. . . . The result is that the sound feels *very present* and *very neutral* and suddenly one no longer has the feeling of the real dimensions of the room, no matter how big it is. So what results is the *enlargement, without any modification in tone,* of a good home stereo system.[33]

Ultimately, Chion feels, we no longer hear and are part of what once was the "*collective* sound" heard in the movie theater; instead, we're provided with "inflated *personal* stereo sound."[34]

Certainly, Chion is not wrong in his acoustical descriptions. Indeed, in various ways, the trailer images and their "scenarios" affirm his sense that we have moved from the space-filling and plenitudinous reverberations that provided the collective sound of previous theatrical experience to a paradoxical state in which cinematic sound, on the one hand, inscribes a



"Rain"

larger, more amplified, and encompassing "superfield" and yet, on the other, is reduced to the dimensions of an extremely personalized and privatized phenomenon.[35] In regard to this paradox, however, we might conceive of how "reverberation" can mean something quite other than Chion's objective acoustic description would allow. If we follow Bachelard's poetics instead, qualities of spatial expansion, amplification, vastness, and immensity are not phenomenologically incompatible with "intimate" space—and, indeed, they may provide the large and often "cosmic" or "elemental" dimensions that allow for a site of less objective reverberation and resonance than the architectural theater: that is, the "intimately immense" space that allows for the internal reverberations of *reverie*. The Dolby trailers' abstracted imagery; their movement which, however kinetic, is generally linked to no visible body-subject and has no fixed object; and their frequent visible evocation of an elongated but fragile temporality are particularly telling here — these characteristics figure most prominently in the "empty" architectonic ruins of "Egypt" and "Temple" and the "timeless" rock formations of "Canyon," but are also present in the "cosmic" imagery of "Aurora," the irresolute "ghostliness" of "Train," and the heightened "slow motion" of "Rain." Thus, in concert with the privatization, intensification, and amplification of digitized sound, the digitized imagery renders not only the immensity, intimacy, and heightened detail of reverie but also the surrounding vagueness of its internalized and hermetic space. Here, as if in the computer game *Myst,* one is *alone* in the sounding world —encountering and meditating (even if only for 30 seconds) on traces of time emergent and time past, on temporality sounding itself out. There is also, however, another kind of internalization—and privatization—of sound at work in the trailers. Perhaps best exemplified by "City" and "Game," but present in all, this is a sound internalized as a sounding not only within the space of the theater but also within the space of the listener's *body*. This is a most compelling —and subjective—form of objective reverberation. As Ihde tells us: "As an exercise in focal attention, the auditory dimension from the outset begins to display itself as a pervasive characteristic of bodily experience. Phenomenologically, I do not merely hear with my *ears*. I hear with my whole body. My ears are at best the *focal* organs of hearing."[36] And Sean Cubitt, in *Digital Aesthetics,* elaborates:

> We do not, and it is impossible to, distinguish between the vibration of the air, the vibration of the eardrum and the bones (the feet, after the ears, are our most sensitive receptors, especially of bass notes; the collarbone and the chest respond to more airborne sounds). . . . Sound events create a space with no respect for the sacrosanctity of the epidermis. . . . At the same time, sound source and sound perception are physically connected by air, proximity, and hearing. . . . The phenomenological interpretation of object and subject is far more difficult to undo in aural than in visual arts.[37]

The thunderous and abrupt sounds of "Game" and particularly of "City," with its crashing percussive and, dare I pun, "cymbalic" pronouncement echoed on the theater marquee as "The Sound of the Future"; the deep and constantly modulating bass of imagined helicopter rotors moving down and inward and around and up in acoustical and visual space; the sheer noise thundering from the speakers to cover up the gap between them; all reverberate in an amplified and substantial existence that would seem to run counter to Chion's description of digital sound as non-reverberant. The reverberation here, however, is of another kind. That is, it is not objectively inscribed in the sound but, rather, comes into existence subjectively—locating and amplifying its sonorous being in the listener's whole body.[38]

In these thunderous percussive trailers, as contrasted with others, reverie is not a phenomenological option. Temporality is not perceived as elongated or cosmic—although it is certainly elemental in its extraordinarily amplified immediacy and presence. Indeed, its presence and "present-ness" are felt in the *doubling* of its "here-ness"—sound resounding through and amplified both outside and inside our being. We

Dolby's "Game"

thus reverberate with an *accelerated temporality* and, more specifically, in an *accelerated present,* in a sounding that quite literally quickens our blood and the very internal tempi of our physical—not meditative—existence.

In both their elongated and accelerated modalities, then, the trailers reverberate with and intensify sound as an embodiment of the sense of time. But, however hermetic, this is not time in the abstract. As Cubitt suggests: "Sound as an art of distance, of space and time, is an art of *movement*."[39] Indeed, in the auditory dimension, sound *is* movement and time. And Ihde tells us that sound is "a gestalt . . . experienced as a succession within the span of duration."[40] Describing this temporal gestalt as essential to even the most ordinary auditory experience, he writes:

> When I listen to auditory events there seems to be no way in which I can escape the sense of a "coming into being" and a "passing from being" in the modulated motions of sound. Here temporality is not a matter of "subjectivity" but a matter of the way the phenomena presents itself. I cannot "fix" the note nor make it "come to stand" before me, and there is an objective like recalcitrance to its "motion."[41]

In the Dolby trailers, we can *see,* then, how sound *hears* and then *imagines* itself temporally sounding. We are in the audible presence of a vision that is constantly moving, "coming into [visible] being" and "passing from [visible] being." Thus, as sound theorist Philip Brophy notes, "Time is not only a sequence of events but also a state of transition [and] morphological development."[42] Here, in the trailers, motion itself is intensified and no "thing" can be made to "stand" fixed before us because of the constant movement. In all but "Stomp" (where the cinematographic camera is also always in motion, panning right across the moving dancers in an uncharacteristic horizontal movement), the trailers' virtual camera moves, in human terms, often impossibly: sinuously through, abruptly up and down and inward—but it never stops (at least until we see the Dolby logo). Furthermore, it is important to emphasize (because it is something we take for granted and never think about) that the movement as such, while experienced as overwhelmingly present and kinetically powerful, is—like sound itself—*immaterial*. Thus Steven Connor writes:

> I say that certain kinds of sound belong not to the order of ostension which dominates the image—in which everything is à voir, to be had by and made clear to the eye—but to an order of mutative conmixture, characterized by the encounter and transformation of imaginary substances. . . . Sound is the realm of metamorphosis.[43]

In this regard, the sonorous being of the trailers' inaugural sounds always dream their own visible realization in relation to movement, modulation, morphological transformation, and flux. Chion also touches on this entailment of temporality and movement when he speaks of "visual microrhythms," and points to "rapid movements on the image's surface caused by things such as curls of smoke, rain, snowflakes, undulations of the rippled surface of a lake, dunes, and so forth—*even the swarming movement of photographic*

grain itself, when visible." (Here, we are brought back again to "Train" and its computer-graphic simulation and dynamics of photographic grain.) As if describing the visual microrhythms of Dolby's "Aurora" or "Rain" or some of the very early and abstract THX trailers, Chion continues: "These phenomena create rapid and fluid rhythmic values, instilling a vibrating, trembling temporality in the image itself. . . . It is as if this technique affirms a kind of *time proper* to sound cinema as a recording of *the microstructure of the present*."[44] Elsewhere, he speaks of certain filmmakers who are "visualists of the ear," and who make "light flutter, vibrate, murmur, twinkle on all kinds of occasions." From all this tremulous movement, he suggests, "we get the feeling that this visual volubility, this luminous patterning is a transposition of *sonic velocity* into the order of the visible."[45] Here, in terms of the trailers and this "sonic velocity" transformed into light and "the order of the visible," we might refer to "City" with its abrupt and thunderous flashes and light-saber helicopter blades as exemplary, but Chion goes on to suggest that this "sonic velocity" drives contemporary "action" films. "In these movies," he writes, "matter—glass, fire, metal, water, tar—resists, surges, lives, explodes in infinite variations, with an eloquence in which we can recognize the invigorating influence of sound on the over-all vocabulary of modern-day film language."[46] Thus, we might well understand the contemporary primacy of action films and their often criticized lack of narrative or character complexity as more sonically inaugurated and driven than previous narratives, "sonic velocity" the equivalent of—and equivalent in importance to—visible "spectacle."

Untethered to narrative, however, unanchored to the sonic gravity of specific sounds anchored firmly to things fixed in the phenomenal world, the Dolby trailers abstract and intensify the sonic velocity and visualizations that usually only punctuate narrative films and serve as their spectacular moments of auditory and visual synchrony and synchresis. Indeed, these primarily "punctual moments" (that serve as the "punctum" of a less spectacular narrative "studium") *are* the Dolby trailers. In them, light vibrates and, in chiaroscuro, comes and goes; and gases, smoke, water, and particles of atmospheric dust visually echo and double the insubstantial yet intense *presence* of sound, movement, and morphological development in their most essential temporal and visual forms. In this, we might well see the Dolby trailers as both an example and an allegory of what Brophy, writing about

Onscreen speakers emerge as part of the "Game."

sound and animated film, calls the "illusion" of "the proto-molecular dissolution of two communicative modes into a single technological phenomenon."[47] Thus, despite a certain lack of reverberation and polyphonic synthesis in the objective digitized sounds Chion decries, we have instead a polyphony of sound as it subjectively imagines and "figures" itself out in the image. Here, then, in the relationship between sound and image in the trailers, there is indeed a blurring of communicative modalities which, as Brophy says of music, "are not only juxtaposed, sequenced or related to one another but are also able to *be evoked within and from one another* via the practice of polyphony, transposition, and modulation."[48]

In sum, in relation to the way in which sound dreams its own reverberant image in the Dolby trailers, I would suggest it functions poetically as more akin to allegory and to certain tropological forms than to mere illustration. The images we see in flux on the screen *parallel* sound qualities in a form of hierarchical *simile* ("this is *like* that") that does not collapse into the synchronic substitution of *metaphor* ("this *is* that"). The images also *extend* and *elaborate* sound qualities, hyperbolizing and generalizing them into *allegorical* significance. (In "Egypt," "Temple," and "Canyon," for example, restless movements through a "timeless" and "elemental" architectural space evoke, as Brophy says in a related context, "a feeling of imminence, of the suspense of something on the verge of happening, of the erotics of *eventfulness*."[49]) Finally (and quite significantly), the trailers' images *fill in* and *substitute* not for another figural form but for a *lack* in certain qualities of their digitized sound—but they do

so *in a different modality*. Hence they function as a form of *catachresis,* sometimes called false and improper metaphor. Used when no proper, or literal, term is available, catachresis is differentiated from metaphor insofar as it forces us to confront, as Paul Ricoeur puts it in *The Rule of Metaphor,* the "failure of proper words, and the need, the necessity to *supplement* their deficiency and failure."[50]

Imagined and inaugurated by sound, the Dolby trailers come into being not only to promote the wonder, power, and difference that marks digital sound, but also to supplement its "lack" and "failure." Indeed, they present us with an audio-vision that is both objectively testing and subjectively dreaming its own possibilities and suspecting its own limits. In this regard, they are exceptional texts, for they dream these possibilities and test these limits within a *digital horizon*. And it is here that they not only assert their presence but also their prescience. If, as announced on the theater marquee in "City," this is "The Sound of the Future," we should listen to and look at it closely, for it tells us much about the contemporary trajectory and dynamics of what we have come to call the "cinema." Thus, as Connor suggests: "The new sound films perhaps look beyond their condition of film: look forward to or begin to sound out the more complex and turbulently convoluted worlds of matter and information, meaning and noise in the emerging sensory orders that may be coming to life."[51]

In his prescient essay, "The Animation of Sound," Brophy points to film looking beyond its condition of film to something else. Distinguishing significant modal differences between live-action and animated film, he contrasts the "cinematic apparatus" with what he calls the "animatic apparatus": "a means for constructing film (for and by both maker and audience) . . . based on an understanding of the *processes of animation* rather than the *principles of animism*."[52] That is, "the animatic apparatus is a machine derived not from animism but from the perceptual model of dynamism."[53] Dormant since the early 1900s, the animatic apparatus reemerged in the 1980s with the advent of both the spatial liberation afforded by Steadicam virtual and the gravity-defying dynamism of computer animation. Unlike the cinematic apparatus, bent on constituting sequences and scenes from fragmented shots, the animatic apparatus is "interested in frames, images, cuts and parts more as events and occurrences than elements or components." It is also "attuned more to the speed and tempo of fragmentation than the formal sequencing or structural organization of fragments" and is concerned with film "more as a transition than a process."[54] Such a visual "animatics" thus "dissolves" the discretion of image and sound—if not at the surface, then certainly at the "proto-molecular level."[55]

This emphasis on the image as an event of sound and the advent of sound as an occurrence of image, this attunement to the speed and tempo of "dissolution," and this concern with transition and the "proto-molecular," also inform the poetic and allegorical work of the Dolby trailers. With the exception of "Stomp," which, however spectacularly, remands us to the photographic and profilmic temporality and soundings of the real (even if the "real" of a Gap clothing advertisement), the Dolby trailers emerge not from the cinematic apparatus but from the animatic apparatus. With the digital limitation as well as the digital imagination of their sounding, they transubstantiate their soundings into figuration that visually reverberates when and where the digitized sound cannot, to create a poetic "sonority of being." In so doing, they resonate not only with the dreams of a digitized ear but also with the reality of contemporary cinema.

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I thank László Tarnay of the Laterna Film Academy in Pécs, Hungary, for the impetus to write this essay, first presented in 2003 at the Academy's conference, "Sound and Image: Film Theory and Practice Across Disciplines." My gratitude also goes to Ioan Allen and Karen Atherton of Dolby Labs, who provided me copies of the Dolby promotional trailers before they became available on DVD, and to Elizabeth Cohen for her helpful technical knowledge and enthusiastic commentary.

Notes

1. Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), 4.
2. Parallel to Bachelard's "ultra-hearing," Gianluca Sergi, in "The Sonic Playground: Hollywood Cinema and its Listeners," writes: "The Hollywood listener is bestowed with an aural experience which elevates him/her to a state which may define the super-listener—a being (not to be found in nature) able to hear sounds that in reality would not be audible or would sound substantially duller." This is cited from an online version found at http://www.filmsound.org/articles/sergei/index.htm in 1999; a more recent print version, "The Hollywood Sonic Playground: the Spectator as Listener," can be found in *Hollywood Spectatorship,* ed. Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes

(London: BFI, 2001). Although his emphasis is different from mine, Sergi has also recently published an extremely significant—and singular—monograph on Dolby Sound Systems and contemporary cinema: *The Dolby Era: Film Sound in Contemporary Hollywood* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).

3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 181.
4. Quotations taken from "Dolby News—March 1997 (ShoWest Edition)," www.dolby.com/assets/pdf/newsletter/407Dolby%20News%20%20March%201997.pdf: and David John Farinella, "Battle of the Trailers," Mix (July 1, 1999), mixonline.com/mag/audio_battle_trailers.
5. Bachelard, 166.
6. Bachelard, xii.
7. Obviously, the Dolby trailers promote a certain kind of sound as "good"; furthermore, as observed by my colleague Rob King, there is a commercial circularity to be found in the trailers: "good sounds are commercial sounds are the sounds of commercial cinema." Certainly, ideological critique can be leveled at the trailers, although that it is not my focus in this present essay.
8. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen,* ed. & trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
9. Ihde, 14.
10. Maxim Gorky, "Lumière," *Roger Ebert's Book of Film,* ed. Roger Ebert (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), 343.
11. Bachelard, 178.
12. Ihde, 125.
13. In an extraordinary phenomenology of film sound, Steven Connor writes: "There is always something belated about auditory identification, partly because the nature of sound is to occupy a passage rather than instant of time, a duration rather than a moment. In order to hear a sound, one must have already heard it start to decay, or come to an end; one must already have started finishing hearing it." See "Sounding Out Film," an unpublished essay elaborating a paper presented at the Institute of English Studies in London in January 2000, and found online at: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/soundingout/.
14. Bachelard, 176.
15. Bachelard, xiii.
16. Bachelard, xii.
17. Bachelard, 166.
18. Bachelard, 166. I might add that the "ear that dreams" is not, either metaphorically or in the theater, a "point of audition." Rather it suggests an "encompassing" ear—one that metaphorically "frames" listening and substantially "surrounds" the listener.
19. Bachelard, 181.
20. Chion, 63.
21. Chion, 58.
22. Scholar and audio engineer Elizabeth Cohen suggests that "Stomp" was produced specifically to display Dolby's latest advances in digitally encoding percussive sound that is particularly difficult. "Stomp" illustrates the capacity of the algorithm to "faithfully" capture the sharp, impulsive, and transient signals inherent in percussive sound and also demonstrates the power of five channels to deliver full dynamic range and the subwoofer channel a percussive "feel" to the acoustic experience.
23. Bachelard, 176
24. Bachelard, 178.
25. Chion, 109.
26. "Today's audiences don't want to *hear* sound effects, they want to *feel* them," says a spokesperson for AMC theaters. See Julie Jordan, "Bring on the Noise," *People* (July 7, 1997): 20, where it is also reported that the Motion Picture Association suggests setting decibel levels no higher than 85: "Some digital-sound theater owners goose it to 90 decibels, sending volume peaks up to 110 decibels—the level of cutting chain saws and taxiing 747s."
27. This effect counters Chion's notion that, unlike the image, sound has no frame. Thus, I would argue with Connor's assertion in "Sounding Out Film," that, following Chion, there is "no 'framing' of sound in the metaphorical sense either: no way to put the hearing of sound into a frame and overhear it. . . . There is no ear of the mind as there is an eye of the mind." While, in particular, the Dolby trailers counter that there indeed is an ear of the mind—"the ear that dreams" and thus "frames," "overhears," and "interprets" sound—they suggest, in general, that digital theatrical sound also presents and represents itself (if in less obvious fashion) as "framed." As Sergi indicates in "The Sonic Playground," the goal of contemporary film sound is "expressiveness." "In other words, audiences are asked by the filmmakers to accept an 'interpretation' of that sound that bypasses the original features of that sound . . . in favor of narrative effectiveness."
28. The goal of THX, developed by Lucasfilm, is to theatrically recreate the sound quality digitally mastered in the mixing studio without extraneous acoustic noise; theaters must therefore meet certain stringent physical criteria to be awarded THX certification.
29. Chion, 150.
30. Chion, 100.
31. Chion, 100-101 (emphasis added). Elizabeth Cohen, in an email to the author, sees Chion's critique of digital cinematic sound as "reduced" to "stereo" as historically situated. She writes: "Because of the success of personal stereo to deliver intimacy and envelope, its success has 'reverberated' into the professional theatrical market. We have now three generations of listeners who expect the immediacy and presence that a personal stereo delivers. This is an audience raised on reproduced sound."
32. Formulated in decibels, the customary industry definition of "reverberation" is the time sound volume relative to area takes to decay.
33. Chion, 100 (emphasis added).
34. Chion, 101 (emphasis added).
35. Sergi, in "The Sonic Playground," writes that contemporary sound is "enveloping" as "multi-channel, multi-directional sound is today organized around the auditorium, not around the image on the screen." He continues, however, with a qualification that would mark this sounding as different from—and more privatized than—that of a concert hall: although organized around the theatrical rather than filmic space, "sound is orchestrated around the *seats* to put the spectator literally 'inside' the film." That is, digital sound has enabled the enlargement of the "sweet spot"—in conventional stereo, previously

that one seat equidistant from the speakers. This enlargement, however, allows each spectator to sit in an ideal yet individuated seat relative to sound and, indeed, the architecture and morphology of multiplex seating encourages this individuation of viewing space with its high and wide seatbacks and stadium seating that forestall visual contact with others. (This is not to disallow a certain new form and sense of theatrical collectivity, but that requires another investigation.)

36. Ihde, 45.
37. Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 95-96.
38. Obviously, the reverberation installed in the body by amplification can move from pleasurable intensity to pain (see note 25 above). Sergi, in "The Sonic Playground," notes: "Contemporary sound systems are powerful enough to move a significant amount of air. As a consequence, the spectator can be 'hit' with sound, and thus experience the film with a far greater degree of physical involvement than ever before. This creates a situation where audiences have to deal with enough constant sound pressure to lead to physical exhaustion, if exercised over time." A witty animated THX sound system trailer takes this to its furthest extremes: using the "Simpsons" characters sitting in a movie theater, it shows eyeglasses shattering, teeth cracking, heads exploding, while deaf Grandpa yells, "Turn it up!" New digital technology allows acoustic pressure that is ten times higher than with analog sound.
39. Cubitt, 117 (emphasis added).
40. Ihde, 88.
41. Ihde, 94.
42. Philip Brophy, "The Animation of Sound," in *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation,* ed. Alan Cholodenko (Sydney: Power Publications, 1991), 82.
43. Connor, "Sounding Out Film."
44. Chion, 17 (emphasis added).
45. Chion, 134 (emphasis added).
46. Chion, 155.
47. Brophy, 74.
48. Brophy, 81.
49. Brophy, 86 (emphasis added).
50. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language,* trans. Robert Czerny, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 63. See also Connor, "Sounding Out Film," for discussion of a catachretic relation between sound being given the "substance" it lacks by other registers of perception.
51. Connor, "Sounding Out Film."
52. Brophy, 68 (emphasis added).
53. Brophy, 69.
54. Brophy, 68.
55. Brophy, 74.

Abstract Nine Dolby theatrical "trailers" were made from the mid-1990s to 2003 specifically to visualize and promote the audio capabilities of digital sound. Drawing on Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Chion's *Audio-Vision,* this essay explores the trailers' sound-driven imagery and suggests its implications for contemporary "mainstream" narrative cinema.

Yiman Wang

The Amateur's Lightning Rod: DV Documentary in Postsocialist China

Anyone may accidentally become a director, a scriptwriter, even a producer. Nevertheless, this has nothing to do with art. The only concern is to capture the world with a third eye (apart from the two naked eyes). . . . Suddenly, we realize the most mundane life is filled with surprises.
—"DV Has Done What a Fool Can Do"[1]

Amateur filmmaking arose with the advent of cinema, and has since evolved with it for the past century throughout the world. In America, amateurism, according to Patricia Zimmermann, "emerged between 1880 and 1920 as the cultural inversion of the development of economic professionalism."[2] Amateur film also played an important role in Hungary between the two World Wars and in the 1960s after the termination of the Stalinist Regime.[3] Briefly speaking, the development of amateur cinema relies upon two significant factors: increased leisure time, and availability of new, economical, easy-to-operate filming technologies. The latter include the handheld still camera in 1888, the 16mm film format in 1923, the 8mm camera after the war, the better-quality "Super 8" format in 1965, video camcorders in the 1980s, and the appearance of digital video (DV) in 1998.[4] Amateur filming, since its inception, has been counterpoised to professional filmmaking. While professional-minded practitioners and critics seek to suture film into appropriate aesthetics,[5] primitive-looking amateur films (consciously or unconsciously) manifest different degrees of stylistic and ideological deviation and transgression. Depending on one's specific agenda, amateur filming may be alternately described positively as pioneering, innovative, and subversive; or negatively as intellectually incoherent, technically inadequate, and aesthetically inferior.[6]

Zimmermann argues that in America, up until the 1960s, amateur film had "progressed from an economic definition to an aesthetic deviation to a social function." Its role in "economic, social, and political life diminished as leisure time expanded," and the discourses have "ultimately positioned amateur film within rigid social hierarchies of work and leisure, commerce and art, professionalism and consumerism."[7] The reason, as Zimmermann implies, is amateur film's increasing confinement to the white, suburban, middle-class American domestic sphere, which leads to the close association between amateur film and home video. She does affirm, however, that "retro fashions" of 1950s and 1960s home videos contributed to restoring a communal feeling in the face of the onslaught of capitalism. Amateur film also plays an important role "as a local and regional witness" in countries or regions that lack a commercial cinema tradition.[8] It provides a valuable angle for reconsidering national cinema, as Liz Czach points out.[9] In these terms, amateur cinema functions as the "Other" site where alternative and marginalized histories are first registered at close range, then recovered by historian-scholars who learn to appreciate and decode its idiosyncratic stylistics. In other words, amateur cinema is valuable because it contains certain aspects of reality unavailable elsewhere. This "truth-value" becomes interestingly complex with the introduction of digital video in the late 1990s.

In the following pages, I explore the cultural and socio-political ramifications of amateur DV documentary in post-1990s China, also known as postsocialist China. Robert Stam observes that "[a]ny discussion of the new media has to speak of their uses and potentialities in specific times and spaces, suggesting both their advantages and their limitation."[10] Following his advice, I anchor my discussion of mainland China's amateur DV documentary in the particular geo-political and historical conditions from which it has arisen. The reason for my focus on post-1990s Chinese amateur DV documentary is twofold. Firstly, it has flourished in the urban public domain since the

Film Quarterly, Vol. 58, Issue 4, pages 16-26. ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2005 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm.

A male extra, not pleased with his bit-part makeup, urges the documentary maker, Zhu Chuanming, to turn off the DV camera in *Extras*.

late '90s and has stimulated wide-ranging public attention and heated discussion. Secondly, DV documentary provides a significant case for studying the role that alternative image-making plays in postsocialist China. To more fully grasp the significance of Chinese amateur DV documentary, I foreground three seemingly anachronistic concepts that have long been subjected to deconstructionist criticism: authorship, self-expression, and realism (or indexicality). I argue that Chinese DV documentaries gesture toward the possibility of reenergizing these terms in a meaningful way, without necessarily re-inscribing essentialism, or reducing mainland China's amateur DV documentaries to an anachronistic, backward version, always one or more steps behind the deconstructionist Western avant-gardes. I argue that the inception of DV has revived the importance of the "author" by relating the author to the amateur and his/her self-expression on the one hand, and to realism on the other. By so doing, it makes a unique political statement in post-1990s Chinese documentary-making.

The Amateur-Author in Postsocialist China

Post-1990s documentarians share a dual stress on self-expression and truth-value. Both romanticist self-expression and the documentary compulsion to establish the truth-value of the digital image are underwritten by the claim to an authorial position. To properly understand the stakes involved in revitalizing the apparently anachronistic notion of "author" in the digital age, we must first delineate the post-1990s socio-cultural context from which such discourses arise.

As I mention above, post-1990s mainland China is also known as "postsocialist" China. Postsocialism, according to Paul Pickowicz, designates the public disillusionment and skepticism about officially defined socialist ideology, and the consequent deconstructive and demythologizing move in post-1990s mainland literary/art circles.[11] Meanwhile, the capitalist turn, introduced in the name of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Deng Xiaoping's term), has led to full-scale commercialization in all trades, including cinema, and hence the emergence of commercial cinema, accompanied by heated debated on the value of such cinema.[12] Both the key-theme cinema (*zhuxuanlu dianying*) that trumpets socialist policies and the commercial cinema that subscribes to capitalist logic are endorsed by a state ideology that seeks to occlude social problems and injustice caused by one-sided economic reform. It is against these two modes of filmmaking that post-1990s amateur documentary positions itself. Its goal is to initiate an alternative—"a third type of imaging," characterized by independence, unofficial quality, and non-commercial interests.[13] The introduction of DV in 1998, after 8mm and Super 8, has further contributed to the "third type of imaging." Thanks to its relative affordability, portability and operational ease, DV filmmaking has stimulated intense interest in a broad spectrum of the population. It is within these specific socio-cultural circumstances that I address the emergence of the amateur-author in post-1990s Chinese amateur DV documentary.

The author (or auteur) and the amateur have conventionally occupied two opposite ends, the former being professionally trained, the latter having little or zero relevant training. In the context of post-1990s

Chinese DV documentary, however, I argue that the author and the amateur are connected by their common stress on the independent creative consciousness of an individual fully immersed in his/her material circumstances. Such a creative individual differs from the bourgeois concept of the individual significantly. Whereas the latter is predicated upon a self-sufficiency that is usually reserved for Western, Caucasian, heterosexual males—who are simultaneously independent of and dominant over economic, social and political conditions—the former refers to a self-consciously assumed subject position that is defined in response to specific material circumstances, and that directly affects the ways of documenting one's material surroundings and individual experiences. The claiming of the amateur-authorial position constitutes a precondition of China's DV documentary in post-1990s China. Likewise, public discourses concerning DV documentary-making center upon the potential *and* limitations of the amateur-author.

The Debate on DV Amateur Documentary-making in Postsocialist China

Since the birth of DV in late-1990s Japan, DV filmmaking has developed rapidly in different places around the world, China included. As in other countries and regions, DV filmmaking in China has produced an expanding group of amateur practitioners, ranging from the 1960s generation to college students. Public media (including the internet) and public spaces have emerged as much-needed platforms for discussing and exhibiting DV projects (including documentaries, short features, and animation). Most of these are motivated and sponsored by unofficial, grassroots organizations, catering to amateur DV-makers. Such venues include: "The New DV Age," a special program of the Hong Kong Satellite Phoenix TV Station that showcases amateur DV works; the "Three Star Digital Man Contest"; "Intel Digital Works Contest"; the Independent Film Festival; online chat with noted directors on DV-related issues, hosted by a major Chinese website, www.sohu.com; "Big Pocket Communication" (*dakoudai chuanbo*) that distributes avant-garde artworks, including DV documentaries; "The Beijing Practice Society" (*Bejing shijian she*) that brings together DV enthusiasts, bars, and cafés near university campuses where independent new media works are screened and discussed (one of the most famous examples being the Yellow Pavilion movie bar in Beijing); and, finally, "The Festival of Chinese Young People's Film Works," sponsored in 2002 by the Hong Kong Phoenix Satellite TV, Beijing University, Tsinghua University, and Beijing Broadcasting Academy, aiming to "encourage independence, avant-garde creative spirit and in-depth social commitment."[14] The first "DV Forum" was held in Beijing from November 27th to 30th of 2003, organized by the DV Research Center at the Beijing Gehua Cultural Development Group. Another important venue is magazines such as *Modern Art* that actively nourish the DV community by instructing amateurs on DIY imaging, filmmaking procedures, equipment, and the budget needed for a complete DV film. All of these venues and events have effectively fostered a booming DV culture amongst urban residents (including directors, fiction writers, poets, film scholars and teachers, and amateur DV enthusiasts), who constitute its unofficial and vernacular base.

The flourishing DV culture simultaneously satisfies and fans middle-aged and younger generations' desire to express their personal experiences with and perceptions of a rapidly shifting environment via a new medium. This new medium does not require much budget or professional training to begin with, and it can be exhibited to an individual as well as a group. This gives rise to the concept of "solo production" (*Geti zhizuo*).[15] The "geti," or individual amateur-author, is defined as an observer-participant whose limited perspective and personal involvement in what is still unfolding in a particular setting render him/her a sympathetic and/or confused explorer, rather than an omniscient storyteller. Authorial status is thus linked not with supreme authority, but rather with his/her *present-ness* on the site of the event. To the extent that the event is still unfolding, the author's knowledge is necessarily limited, partial, and provisional.

This is most clearly demonstrated in Wu Wenguang's refusal to offer generalizations on the independent documentary in postsocialist China.[16] In his article, "Just on the Road," Wu begins with these words, "The 1990s are only two years behind us, and it is hard to formulate a clear overview. Looking back at the documentaries produced during the 1990s, the people involved and my own work, I feel it is premature to analyze too deeply, for all is in the process of becoming, or at an exploratory stage."[17] By emphasizing the ongoing-ness of the event (be it documentary filmmaking or its theorization), Wu presents himself as an author whose credibility comes from his close participation in the event, rather than his command of it.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the author of the "solo production" mostly appears as an amateur. Derived from the Latin, *amator,* the word *amateur* has to do with *amare,* or love, and refers to a devoted lover or an enthusiastic pursuer of an object. This is precisely how a Chinese amateur DV filmmaker, nicknamed "liar," describes his commitment to DV documentary film—"sticking to our hobby as a profession."[18] Furthermore, the "amateur" is privileged in the discourses on DV filmmaking in that it is oftentimes associated with the "unofficial" (*minjian*) and the "private" (*siren hua*).

One important champion of amateur film is Jia Zhangke, commonly recognized as the Godfather of the Chinese DV documentary,[19] who declared in 1999 that the "amateur DV age is just around the corner," for which he offered unreserved support.[20] In response to the ensuing misappropriation of this statement, Jia later clarified his stance by arguing that the "amateur" refers to new blood and an experimental spirit, which is opposed to staid filming conventions, especially the extant film system in China, and that "amateur" does not imply lowered standards, nor is amateur filmmaking a single-person business.[21] The reason is that filmmaking inherently relies upon teamwork, and not individualistic heroism.[22] Indulgence in personal authority and low-quality DV images are, therefore, antithetical to what Jia sees as the amateur spirit.

Like Jia Zhangke, Zhang Yang, another well-known mainland Chinese director, sees amateur DV as a democratizing "weapon" that decentralizes the state-controlled film industry by allowing an ordinary person to express his/her outlook on the screen.[23] Without mentioning the term "amateur," Zhang implicitly endorses amateur filmmaking by emphasizing the filmmaker's original ideas and persistent practice, which, according to him, supersede the mastering of the medium and technology per se.[24] Zhang further argues that creativity distinguishes DV filmmaking from Karaoke, which encourages slavish imitation.[25]

The amateur turn is further testified to by Xu Hong's observation that college students (mostly non-film majors) now lead the Chinese DV culture.[26] The craze for the new technology and gadgetry is explained by Xie Honggan and Han Yan—co-directors of a DV short feature, *The Happy Life of a Dog*—in these terms: "We used to express our youthful restlessness, loss and anxiety with guitar. Now we've found a new means of self-expression."[27] Other than college students, freelance art workers who migrate to cities along with the urban-bound labor population also play an important role in DV filmmaking. Their itinerant life experiences allow them to pay particular attention to marginalized social sectors, such as other itinerant art workers, migrant workers (*mingong*),[28] laid-off urban workers, prostitutes, and gays/lesbians. The shared experience of marginalization has led Jia Zhangke to describe himself as a "migrant worker in the film industry" (*dianying mingong*), which carries a strong amateur connotation, and that his goal is to bring to surface occluded social aspects. Herein lies the unofficial, private, and subversive potential of the amateur-oriented DV documentary.

The agency of the potential is none other than the amateur-author and his/her dedication to truth as experienced by him/herself. To shoot with a DV, just like to write with a pen, is to trace truth and to express one's experiences—hence the recurring discursive analogy of the pen and the DV. For Jia Zhangke, "a DV can change a director into a painter, a poet, always ready to jot down flitting thoughts and inspirations."[29] This analogy accurately captures the advantages of this emergent digital technology, namely, its light weight, easy operation, low cost, and as a result of all these, intimacy between the filmmaker and the subject. Along the same line, Wu Wenguang predicts that "DV can become a writing tool like a pen,"[30] which best suits a film diary, or "writing in imagery" (*yingxiang de shuxie*).[31]

The pen/camera analogy is not an isolated moment in film history. Rather, it has occurred in three other significant cinematic instances: Chinese cinema in the late 1940s, French auteurism, and contemporary Western digital cinema. Sometimes seen as anticipating postwar Italian neo-realism, Shanghai's social realist cinema, which was produced in late-1940s China under economic and technical stress and rightist political repression, took upon itself the exposure of social problems, particularly the hardships the disenfranchised had to suffer. In this context, Shen Fu, a 1940s scriptwriter/director who contributed significantly to the social realist cinema, described his camera as a pen that could write a melody, draw a portrait, and delineate the characters' complicated mental world, rather than simply illustrating ideas.[32] Coinciding with Shen Fu's pen metaphor was Alexander Astruc's 1948 essay, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo," which inspired the auteurist notion of "personal cinema." In this essay, Astruc described "the camera as a pen, the screen as a piece of paper, and the director as an author."[33] The auteurist notion of filmmaking took a further turn when the French New Wave representative Jean-Luc Godard

observed that filmmaking meant that "One is always alone on the set as before the blank page."[34]

The contemporary digital era adds a new spin to the image of a solitary author engrossed in the creative process. Whereas digital technology has severely challenged single authorship, as many critics have noted, it may also be seen in the opposite way, as George Lucas argues. Digital filmmaking, for Lucas, resembles "the process of a painter or sculptor. You work on it for a bit, then stand back and look at it and add some more onto it, then stand back and look at it and add some more. You basically end up layering the whole thing."[35] The intimate, interactive, and performative process Lucas describes echoes the pen/camera analogy deployed in the Chinese discourses on DV documentary. This process makes amateur DV documentary a significant vehicle for experiential knowledge and self-expression in postsocalist China.

The dual passion of self-expression and faithful documentation results in the documentarians' self-conscious deployment of "cruelty." By cruelty, I mean their deliberate violation of the codes of decorum, or the documentary ethic, that help to maintain the subjects' dignity. The amateur documentarians' presumed tendency to abuse the power of DV leads Zhang Yuan, a Sixth Generation director, to criticize amateur cinema. Quoting Wang Xiaobo, a liberal cultural critic, who sees amateur poetry as ushering in the death of real poetry in the former Soviet Union, Zhang describes "amateur" as a frightening premonition of demise.[36] Zhang's anxiety concerns "amateur" authorship in particular, rather than the DV technology per se, which he himself employs in a documentary, *Miss Jin Xing*—a Chinese male-to-female transsexual's self-account.

"Extras" sleeping in bushes under a highway

Contrary to Zhang, I argue that the cruelty inscribed in the amateur documentary does not simply violate the conventional documentary ethic; more importantly, it postulates a new relationship between the documentarian and his/her subjects. On this basis, it demands a new way of conceiving the aesthetics, the mode of presentation, and the epistemological and social functions of the amateur DV documentary. This new mode of documentary can tentatively be called the "documentary of cruelty," as illustrated by the DV instances discussed in the next section.

On-site Documentation and DV Cruelty

A prominent case of a documentary of cruelty is *Extras* (*Qunzhong yanyuan,* 2001), shot with a SONY-PD100 by Zhu Chuanming,[37] a Beijing Film Academy graduate and a cinematographer. *Extras* documents the hope, sorrow, and frustration of a group of extras hopelessly waiting for work outside the Beijing Film Studio. When screened at an Independent Film Festival in Hong Kong, Zhu's 120-minute version was criticized for its "fascist violence." The audience, according to the description on the video-CD package, was divided between berating the film for its "violent assault on its subjects" and acclaiming its bold effectiveness. Zhu himself describes the film as imbued with "the air of hormone" (*he'ermeng qixi*). If the documentary seems to unethically indulge in exposing the extras' unpleasant, coarse, even animalist life situation, Zhu deliberately wills it to be this way, and he is keenly aware of the impact, on *himself* as well as the subjects. Commenting upon his two documentaries, *The Beijing Cotton Fluffer* (*Beijing tanjiang*) and *Extras,* Zhu describes DV as a double-edged sword, wounding himself while wounding the subjects, due to its ability to insert itself into a site without disrupting the natural order.[38] To document with a DV, according to Zhu, is a *cruel act* since it can bring no benefits, but only damage to the subjects.[39] As a result, "we're excited with its extreme realism. But we're also too weak to bear it."[40] The "extreme realism" produces what he calls the "individuals rendered crystal clear" (*yilan wuyu de ren*) in the process of documentation.

Such a helpless, yet cruel, compulsion to stare at actual, uncouth situations also motivates Yang Lina's (a.k.a. Li Tianyi) documentary, *The Old Men* (*Laotou,*

Bao Hehua, a female extra, sits with male extras as they tell sexual jokes.

1999). A stage actress by profession, Yang becomes the first female amateur DV documentarian by following a group of retired, "useless" old men routinely gathered in the neighborhood, chatting and complaining, over a two-year period. Yang started with a professional cameraman and a sound engineer. However, disappointed with the professionals' insistence on rearranging the old men's seating and staging their interactions, Yang gave up the idea of professional documentary and resorted to "solo production" with a PANASONIC EZ-1 DV. According to Wu Wenguang, who helped Yang with the project, her hesitancy and nervousness as an amateur paradoxically led to the most appropriate long and steady shots with little panning, tilting, or close-ups.[41] The long-range documentation does not exclude Yang's interactions with the old men, however. Rather, she makes explicit her physical existence on the site by having the old men on the screen greeting her as she stands offscreen. The process of documentation is therefore an intersubjective, age-crossing communication, mediated by an amateur-operated DV. Yang's sympathetic perspective contributes to her lingering and sensitive tracing of the on-site and oftentimes real-time unfolding of the old men's everyday life details.

Yet even such a sympathetic documentary, mostly done in long shots and long takes, has its own cruel dimensions. Firstly, as Yang notes, when this documentary won an award while the old men (except those who had passed away) continue their old lifestyle of sitting and chatting along the street, she "feels like a thief who has stolen something from the old men simply to adorn herself."[42] Secondly, and more importantly, to follow for two years an elderly group that is keenly aware of its approaching death means to chronicle disappearance in a kind of countdown process. Yang's unobstructed, almost transparent tracing of this group's life details from day to day painstakingly reveal how temporal and social changes transfigure human beings, as demonstrated by the old men's failing bodies. The act of witnessing the impending disappearance and demise produces an uncanny sense of *cruelty*. As a viewer summarizes, "Aging is terrifying . . . even to talk about this documentary is terrifying, since it really hurts our sense of dignity."[43]

A similar sense of helplessness can be found in *The Box* (*He'zi,* 2002) on the part of the documentarian, by Ying Weiwei, another female amateur DV-maker.[44] *The Box* documents how a lesbian couple interact with each other at home during a seven-day period. It has been accused of exploitative voyeurism and artificial setup of the situation. To justify her project, Ying states that the couple voluntarily responded to her online solicitation for interest, and that the filming is less about fitting them into her design than fitting herself into their home. Ying emphasizes her "silence" in the shooting process, viewing herself as a woman allowed into the private space, becoming a "family" member, yet inevitably remaining an "Other," or a filmmaker with a DV. The result shows how an amateur filmmaker tests the limit of her capacity to remain reticent as an observer on the site.[45] The apparent total passivity renders Ying a mere "recorder and a witness," whose "documenting process is also a process of feeling and touching their [the lesbian couple's] real lives." Like Yang's long-shot and long-term tracing of the old men's lives, Ying's focus upon the couple's "raw" life details through the microscopic lens of DV suggests a painful experience. For

A long shot of an old man slowly crossing the street to go home in *The Old Men*

An old man dies under the "cruel" gaze of the camera.

one thing, to document others confuses her own identity, making her unsure if she should play the role of the director, recorder, listener, or witness, whether she should be absent or present. Furthermore, Ying emphasizes that whereas she has documented the lesbian couple's harmonious life for now, her documentary would be of no avail should the couple's relationship encounter any difficulty. As she acknowledges, "The result is beyond my control. The cruelty of a documentary lies precisely in its excessive proximity to reality."[46]

The amateur documentarians' recurring emphasis on the "cruelty" of documentation suggests their awareness of a conventional documentary ethic *and* their decision to go against it in order to deliver what they see as the truth. In these terms, the question one should ask is not simply what is the bottom line of DV documentary making, or how far it can go without becoming too intrusive and exhibitionistic; but rather whether it is necessary and possible to justify the "guilty" ethics of deliberately cutting into the private realm of everyday reality and exposing it with unbearable clarity. One certain thing is that the anxiety about excessive details reconfirms the indexical power of the "guilty" DV image. It appears voyeuristic, exhibitionistic, even potentially damaging, precisely because it is deemed immediate and indexical. In other words, DV documentaries' potential epistemological and aesthetic violence is ultimately connected to its truth-value.[47]

Significantly, the "truth," or the "reality," captured with a DV is not the external, objective world, but the ostensibly inconsequential real-life details, as perceived and experienced, yet not systematized, by the amateur-author behind the DV lens. Such experiential reality resembles what Raymond Williams calls the "structure of feeling," or social experiences that are still *in process,* "present and affective," often not yet recognized as social and political.[48] In Wu Wenguang's words, it "audibly pulses, breathes, and smells of sweat." Or, as Jennifer Jason Leigh observes in connection with her performance in a Dogme 95 film, *The King Is Alive* (dir. by Kristian Levring), "[i]t was visceral and shocking."[49]

The focus on the raw and undefined quality of human existence and its social issues requires that the documentary makers pay particular attention to the actual environment in which they and their subjects are situated. The environment refers not simply to the visible surroundings, but also to the traces or detritus of what has happened before, and what marginalized groups (the elderly, migrant workers, itinerant performers, etc.) have been reduced to as a result of temporal and spatial dislocation and social exploitation. The task of the Chinese DV documentary is precisely to capture the multi-layered and heterogeneous environment, thereby bringing out social issues. Jia Zhangke, drawing upon Michelangelo Antonioni, observes, "You may find something within the space, feel its existence, then trust it."[50] Furthermore, the amateur documentarian must allow him/herself to be "seared" (*zhuoshao*) by the actual, material ambience to the extent that the immediate present (which crystallizes layers of the past) becomes the only concern.[51] Jia's term, "searing," underscores the violence involved when the "reality" imprints the documentary with its irreversible and irresistible traces, as if to make a DV documentary is to *wound* oneself.

Interestingly, Jia is not the first person to use the word "sear" to describe the process of representation and creation. Walter Benjamin similarly described a photograph as being "seared" by its immediate context (the Here and Now).[52] Whereas the two uses of "searing" occur at very different historical moments and concern two variant media, they both deal with how certain modes of representation become possible with the emergence of new technologies. Furthermore, they both describe representation in terms of "wounding," which reality inflicts upon representation, and the author, by extension. A significant difference is that the amateur DV documentaries in postsocialist China are seared in a manner that implies cruel and visceral experiences. Due to their mobilization of alternative experiences, epistemological violence, and relentlessly detailed documentation, post-1990s amateur DV documentaries necessarily deviate from and rebel against official and commercial media institutions alike. This independent and oppositional stance is ultimately derived from the

amateur documentarians' self-defined authorial status, which, as discussed previously, is positioned as a *witness* with limited knowledge and little power to change reality. In the next section, I discuss exactly what enables the political stance of the amateur DV documentarians, and how we should understand their significance at the turn of the twenty-first century.

"Searing" Reality and Subaltern Interests

As many DV critics and practitioners have generally concurred, the advent of DV in the late 1990s has, in a sense, disrupted China's nation-owned cinema industry. DV makes possible amateur filmmaking, which mainly operates outside the incumbent industry and official system. The amateur perspective of DV has encouraged collective attention to the detailed modes of life experienced by marginalized social groups. The purpose is to make visible frequently occluded social arenas, thereby teasing out neglected but important social issues, rather than reductively incorporating them into an a priori master narrative. In other words, amateur DV documentary-making implies a political stance. Its truth claim aims to debunk institutionalized filmmaking. Jia Zhangke, for example, observes that DV contributes to decentralizing and deterritorializing filmic hegemony.[53] "xzfd," a participant in the unsuccessful amateur DV project, *The Invisible City* (*Kanbujian de chengshi*), similarly argues that the official documentary's emphasis on lucidity and fluency actually constitutes a rape of the subjects, while his own DV documentary provides "a new possibility of and a new angle on history," thus contributing to a reform of the audio-visual regime.[54] Likewise, Wu Wenguang states, "DV most appropriately represents a form of private writing and an unofficial (*minjian*) stance . . . one individual can do all the work and *visibilize a reality*. This is how DV disentangles the image from the control of a system, a group or a clique, and make it a genuinely individual creation."[55]

The new challenge to the extant film culture and overall filmic representation has everything to do with the emergent digital technology. As Raymond Williams argues, technological shifts since the nineteenth century "have been directly linked with a sense of *crisis in the relationship of art to society,* or in the very purposes of art which had previously been agreed or even taken for granted."[56] The crisis described here is a representational one. More specifically, each technological shift simultaneously problematizes the received modes of representation *and* calls for new

The Old Men: Long shot of the men's chairs (in the background), now deserted and snow-laden—a pre-figuration of their impending disappearance/death

ones. Technological renovations must therefore be understood as correlated with shifting strategies of representation.

The amateur mobilization of DV for documentary making signals precisely such a new mode of representation, as suggested in the key statement, "my camera doesn't lie" (*Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang*). This statement began as a theme line in *Suzhou River* (dir. Lou Ye, 1999),[57] and was then used as the title of Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou's 2002 volume composed of interviews with major Sixth Generation directors.[58] It functions as this generation's virtual "declaration of independence" insofar as it emphasizes an *oppositional* agency derived from a subjective amateur perspective (*my* camera) and a unique truth claim (*not* lying). By refocusing on the "truth," or marginalized, subaltern life experiences unfolding on-site, DV documentarians challenge extant representational paradigms, generate alternative strategies of representation, and formulate new ways of relating to material circumstances. Characterized by relatively easy set-up, portable audio-visual imagery, and low-cost online transmission, amateur DV documentaries gesture toward a "guerrilla" strategy that constantly adapts itself to the occasion.

Given the importance of the site, or the environment, the documentarians and their subjects can play no other roles than those they really occupy on the site. Thus, they come into an intimate yet distanced relationship, their differing life trajectories simultaneously intersecting with and diverging from each other. As Wu Wenguang comments on his documentary, *On the Road,* the process of documenting the itinerant troupe is just like "documenting my own life, as if I were shooting my autobiography."[59] Likewise, the

documentary merges into a highly textured actual event—contingent, unstaged, and unfolding in real time, rather than a media event concocted by media makers within the system.

The power of such a documentary, as Jane Gaines argues about documentaries utilizing realism for political ends, is derived from the world of which it is a copy.[60] A significant difference is that, unlike the activist documentary that conveys an explicitly articulated political agenda, the densely textured amateur DV documentary in postsocialist China only seeks to "provide a unique historical experience, so as to alter the way people remember things."[61] Indeed, the amateur DV documentarians quoted above all emphasize their non-interfering perspective and inability to change or redirect what is happening.

The documentarian's de-emphasis on agitation or activism warns us against taking the unofficial DV documentaries as activist polemics. Nor does the amateur authorship inscribed in these documentaries suggest activism. Rather, the authorship consists of the act of witnessing and recording with a sense of honesty that verges upon cruelty. The amateur DV documentary-makers in postsocialist China can therefore be seen as a hybrid of social ethnographers and social realists. Their contribution consists of bringing subaltern interests into public consciousness, thereby producing an alternative strategy of representation and articulation. A crucial step in this process is to encounter multivalent material circumstances, to expose oneself to such environments, like holding up a lightning rod in a thunderstorm. It is only by allowing him/herself to be seared by the environment that the documentary maker is able to channel and manifest an electrifying reality.

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Notes

1. In *Yunnan Daily,* (Sept. 25, 2001). http://www.zaobao.com/special/newspapers/2001/09/yndaily250901.html, (cited Dec. 5, 2003).
2. Patricia Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 7.
3. Márton Kurutz, "Revolving Pictures," *Metropolis* (Summer 1998). This article presents a short history of the Hungarian amateur cinema.
4. I draw these technological moments (with the exception of the DV moment, which is the focus of this essay) from Stefan Szczelkun, "Amateur Film/Home Movies/ Underground Film," in his *Exploding Cinema 1992-1999: Culture and Democracy* (unpublished dissertation, RCA, 2002). http://www.stefan-szczelkun.org.uk/phd206.htm (cited Dec. 4, 2003).
5. This patronizing stance is fully illustrated in the 1920s and '30s writings in *American Cinematography,* a professional film magazine which Zimmerman quotes extensively in her 1995 volume on amateur film.
6. Szczelkun, op. cit.
7. Zimmermann, 145.
8. Patricia Zimmermann, "Cinema et democratie," *Communications* 68 (1991): 283.
9. Liz Czach, "The Catherine Films: Rethinking Our National Cinema from an Amateur Perspective," *Take One* (July-August 2002): 19.
10. Robert Stam, "Post-cinema: Digital Theory and the New Media," in Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 325.
11. See Paul Pickowicz, "Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism," in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics,* ed. Nick Browne et. al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
12. For a useful discussion of the flourishing commercial film industry in mainland China, see Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
13. See Yan An, "A Third Type of Imaging" (Di sanlei yingxiang). http://cn.cl2000.com/video/film/dldy/jsdd/wen.shtml (cited Nov. 19, 2003).
14. "The Phoenix TV Collaborating with Key Universities to Bring forth Young DV Talents" (Fenghuang weishi yu zhongdian gaoxiao hezuo; DV zuoping xiu chu qingchun fengcai). http://wenxue.tom.com/xinwen/, quoted in Zhang Xiyuan, "DV Communication: A 'Golden Key' to Personal Image Age" (DV chuanbo: kaiqi geren yingxiang shidai de 'jin yaoshi'), *China Media Reports* (Zhongguo chuanmei baogao) 2 (2002). http://www.filmsea.com.cn/newsreel/dv/200303280016.htm (cited Dec. 5, 2003).
15. Anonymous, "A Cold Rumination on DV" (Dui DV de leng sikao). http://www.filmsea.com/newsreel/dv/200309090025.htm, (cited Nov. 22, 2003). The Chinese term for "solo production," *geti zhizuo,* echoes *getihu,* or a self-employed worker, a term widely used in the 1980s, when the Deng Xiaoping regime's policy on economic reform encouraged young people to start their own business (oftentimes a mere street-side stand). The flourishing of the *getihu* business arguably led to a degree of capitalization of the Chinese economy, carefully managed by the government. What distinguishes *geti zhizuo* (or solo production) from *getihu* is its cultural emphasis, and more importantly, its out-of-the-system insistence, as opposed to the *getihu* economy that is derived from the hegemonic system.
16. Wu Wenguang was the first amateur documentary maker working with a camcorder. He started shooting his first documentary, *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamer* (Liulang Beijing: zuihou de mengxiangzhe), started in 1988, and completed in 1990. This documentary recorded the travel and work of five itinerant artists, and is com-

monly deemed the upper limit of Chinese documentary production. His other works include *1966: My Red Guard Era* (1966: wo de hongweibing shidai) (1993), *At Home in the World* (Sihai wei jia) (1995)—the sequel of *Bumming in Beijing*—and the most recent, *Jianghu: Life on the Road,* which traces the hardships a provincial song-and-dance troupe encounters in Beijing and its suburbs.

17. Wu Wenguang, "Just on the Road: A Description of the Individual Way of Recording Images in the 1990s," in Wu Hung et. al., eds. *Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art 1990-2000* (Guangdong: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002), 132.
18. Liar, "A Dream Doesn't Need to Rhyme: Three Persons' Dialogue on DV" (Meng shi keyi bu yayun de: guanyu DV de sanren duihua), from New Youth Film Forum at Beijing University (Beida xin qingnian dianying luntan). http://www.filmsea.com/newsreel/dv/200211050021.htm (cited Nov. 22, 2003).
19. Jia Zhangke is one of the most frequently awarded Sixth Generation directors in China, best known for his documentary-like feature films set in his home province, Shan'xi, in northwest China. His films include *Xiao Wu* (1997), *Platform* (Zhangtai) (2000), and *Unknown Pleasures* (Ren xiaoyao) (2002). The last is a DV film based on *In Public* (Gonggong changsuo) (2001), a short DV documentary about a transitioning city in Shan'xi province. It is part of a project called "Three People Three Colors," that deals with the notion of space, commissioned by the 2001 Chonju Film Festival in Korea. The other two participants in this project were Tsai Mingliang (a Taiwanese New Wave director heavily influenced by François Truffaut) and John Akomfah, a British director. Like the Sixth Generation in general, Jia Zhangke breaks away from the Fifth Generation's interest in epic narrative and national allegory, and turns his attention to a slice of life in marginalized social sectors.
20. See Jia Zhangke, "The Amateur Film Age Is Just Around the Corner" (Yeyu dianying shidai jijiang daolai), in *The South Weekly* (Nanfang zhoumo), 1999.
21. See "*In Public*: The Young Director, Jia Zhangke's New DV Film" (Qingnian daoyan Jia Zhangke de DV xinpian: gonggong changsuo), *Modern Art* (Xiandai yishu) (February, 2002). http://www.chinavisual.com/EPS/articles/articles/article?id=1950 (cited Nov. 22, 2003).
22. "Jia Zhangke Waiting at the 'Platform': A Dialogue with Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou" (Jia Zhangke zai 'zhantai' shang dengdai), in *My Camera Doesn't Lie: Files of Avant-garde Chinese Filmmakers Born Between 1961 and 1970* (Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang: Xianfeng dianying ren dang'an, shenyu 1961–1970), ed. Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou (Beijing: China Friendship Press, 2002), 358-59.
23. Zhang Yang, conventionally categorized as a Sixth Generation director, is best known for his *Shower* (Xizao, 1999) and *Quitting* (Zuotian, 2001), the latter featuring Jia Hongsheng (an actor favored by Sixth Generation directors) and his real-life parents reenacting the true story of how he successfully quit his heroin addiction years ago. For Zhang Yang's comments on DV, see "The Famous Director, Zhang Yang, Interviewed in the Chat Room of www.sohu.com" (Zhuming daoyan, Zhang Yang, zuoke souhu jiabing liaotianshi fangtan shilu) at http://yule.sohu.com/49/99/article214599949.shtml (cited Nov. 20, 2003).
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Xu Hong, "College Students Lead the DV Culture" (Da xuesheng chengwei DV wenhua zhujiao), *China Youth Newspaper* (Zhongguo qingnian bao) (Sept. 2, 2003). http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/EDU-c/396203.htm (cited Dec. 6, 2003).
27. Quoted in Xu Hong
28. *Minggong* is a special term referring to peasants who have left the countryside for big cities and better work opportunities, which are, actually, jobs despised by urbanites. Migrant workers or *minggong,* therefore, usually have to suffer prejudice, marginalization, and criminalization in order to survive in the city.
29. See Jia Zhangke's comments on his experience with shooting *Unknown Pleasures* with DV. Quoted in Mao Jian, "Better to Remain the Grassroot" (Haishi caogen dian hao), *Xinming Weekly* (Xinming zhoukan). http://www.xinminweekly.com.cn/20030908/wh/200309090391.htm (cited Nov. 23, 2003).
30. See "The Mecca of DV Filmmakers: The Slamdance Festival" (DV ren de caoshengdi, shilandanshi dianyingjie). http://www.6to23.com/s18/s18d3/s18d3d1/20031191324 4337.htm (cited Nov. 24, 2003).
31. "As Surreal as the Real" (Xiang xianshi nayang chao xianshi). http://vod.hengshui.com/yt/xw/03-133.htm (cited Nov. 21 2003).
32. See Shen Fu, "The Camera Is a Pen—A Director's Experiences" (Kaimaila shi yizhi bi—fangwen ji, tan daoyan jingyan), originally published in *Journal of Film and Theatre* (Yingju congkan) (November, 1948), reprinted in Ding Yaping, *Imaging China: 1945-1949* (Yingxiang Zhongguo) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1998), 482.
33. See James Naremore, "Authorship," in *A Companion to Film Theory,* ed. Toby Miller and Robert Stam (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 10–11.
34. Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard,* ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 76. Quoted in Naremore, 11.
35. Kevin Kelly and Paula Parisi, "Beyond *Star Wars,* What's Next for George Lucas," *Wired* (February, 1997): 163. Quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, "Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time," in *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable,* ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Kay Hoffman (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 206.
36. See "Conversation with Zhang Yuan" (Duihua . . . Zhang Yuan). http://www.rongshuxia.com/channels/zj/channelz/zhangyuan.htm (cited Nov. 20, 2003).
37. Zhu Chuanming notes in his self-account that the high-quality, compact-sized SONY-PD100 suits his documentary purposes especially well. See "Zhu Chuanming's Self-Account: Those Whom I Care About—On My Two Documentaries" (Zhu Chuanming zishu: Naxie wo yuanyi guanzhu de ren—guanyu wo de liangbu jilupian), *Yishu Shijie* (The Art World). http://www.tosin163.com/xinwen/html/dv_r/2004-2-15/200421502138.shtml (cited July 15, 2004).
38. Ibid.
39. See Cai Ping, "Starting from the Substratum" (Cong diceng kaishi), *China Youth Daily* (Zhongguo qingnian bao) (Dec. 4, 2002). http://www.xlmz.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=496&sid=S3sgdYzg (cited Dec. 3, 2004).

40. Ibid.
41. Wu Wenguang, in *Reinterpretation,* 135.
42. Yang Tianyi, "How I Shot *Old Men*: an Interview with the Documentary Director, Yang Tianyi" (Wo pai *laotou* – jilupian daoyan Yang Tianyi fangtan), *Yishu shijie* (The Art World) 7 (2001). http://www.yishushijie.com/dv/2001/2001-07.htm (cited July 15, 2004).
43. Ibid.
44. This 88-minute documentary was shot with Panasonic DS99, edited with a Betacam editing machine, DPS, and finished in August 2001.
45. See "Flying in the Womb" (Zigong li de feixiang). http://www.bjmdc.com/xunyicao/new_page_32.htm (cited Nov. 20, 2003).
46. Ibid.
47. The assumption of the DV image's truth-value in Chinese discourse is the polar opposite to Western critics' argument that digital technology takes away from documentary truth-value. Brian Winston, for example, argues that the traceless alteration made possible by digital technology "destroys the photographic image as evidence of anything except the process of digitalization." See Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: BFI, 1995), 259. The same digital challenge can also be viewed positively as an opportunity to release documentary from the burden of representation. For Michael Renov, the "electronically and digitally-based representations of the historical real have begun to shed the epistemological and ethical burden of single-minded truth-telling, the mainstay of one hundred years of documentary practice deeply linked to modernism." See Michael Renov, "Documentary Disavowals, Or, the Digital, Documentary and Postmodernity," in *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics* 13 (2001): 108. In both arguments, truth-value is confined to traditional documentary, which is now deemed outdated, problematic, or unnecessary by digital technology. Contrary to this, Chinese DV practitioners and critics tend to see DV's operational ease and apparently effortless penetration into everyday life as a gateway to the image's im-mediate and organic connection with material reality.
48. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132-135.
49. Anne Thompson, "Cinema Purité," in *Premiere Magazine,* reprinted in Shari Roman, *Digital Babylon: Hollywood, Indiewood, & Dogme 95* (Hollywood, CA: ifilm publishing, 2001), 219. Dogme 95 refers to a school of DV filming originated in Copenhagen in spring 1995, its goal being to counter the film of illusion by carrying out "the vow of chastity." See "The Manifesto," in Shari Roman, 40, 41. Significantly, whereas the Dogme 95 group attributes the film of illusion to the "technological storm" that "can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation," they also rely upon technological advance (including DV) for restoring authenticity. High-tech thus serves the antithetical purposes of illusion-making and unmaking.
50. "*In Public*: The Young Director, Jia Zhangke's New DV Film," op. cit.
51. Jia Zhangke, "I, As Myself, Express What I See" (Wo duli biaoda wo suo kandao de shijie). http://ent.tom.com/1002/1011/20031111-59933.html (cited Nov. 20, 2003).
52. Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography," in his *One-Way Street and Other Writings,* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), 242, 243. For Benjamin, a photograph contains "the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has . . . *seared* the subject." This searing spark of contingency will continue to animate the photograph even for future viewers.
53. "*In Public*: The Young Director, Jia Zhangke's New DV Film," op. cit.
54. "xzfd", "How to Look For Things in An Invisible City" (Zai kanbujian de chengshi ruhe xunzhao). http://www.filmsea.com/newsreel/dv/200211050024.htm (cited Nov. 22, 2003). The contrast between an individually motivated amateur documentary and an official product done by professionals is further brought out by Zhang Xianming, who compares the former with a wild flower (or *fleur du mal*) that causes people to sneeze, as opposed to the latter—a plastic flower that is permanently open, but odorless-less and pollen-less. See Zhang Xianming, "Postscript to *My Camera Doesn't Lie*: Fleurs du Mal—Retrospective of Mainland Chinese Independent Film" (Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang Ba: E zhi hua—dalu duli dianying huigu). http://www.filmsea.com.cn/focus/article/200206210066.htm (cited Nov. 22, 2003).
55. Wu Wenguang's speech at a "DV Group Study" in August 2000. Quoted in Zhu Jingjiang, *South Weekly* (Nanfang zhoumobao). http://www.xlmz.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=1416&sid=OYeYGhzQ (cited Nov. 30, 2003), italics mine.
56. Raymond Williams, op. cit., 163, italics mine.
57. Directed by a Sixth Generation director, Lou Ye, this film unfolds from the subjective, often unreliable perspective of an itinerant artist who camcorders mundane, fragmentary happenings along the Suzhou River in Shanghai. This artist's voiceover in the film begins with the line, "my camera doesn't lie" (Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang).
58. This volume is cited in note 22.
59. See Cai Ping, "Starting from the Substratum" (Cong diceng kaishi), *China Youth Daily* (Zhongguo qingnian bao) (Dec. 4, 2002). http://www.xlmz.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=496&sid=S3sgdYzg (cited Dec. 3, 2004).
60. Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis," in *Collecting Visible Evidence,* ed. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 95.
61. Chen Suqing, "Another Memory: Reflection on Independent Documentary" (Ling yizhong jiyi: dui duli jilupian de fansi). http://www.filmsea.com.cn/focus/article/200306270012.htm (cited Dec. 1, 2003).

Abstract This article examines the cultural politics of DV documentaries emerging from postsocialist China, discussing the documentary-makers as amateur-authors. It goes on to argue that the documentarians' self-consciously deployed aesthetics of cruelty constitutes a socio-political claim for an alternative "real," derived from a subaltern "structure of feeling."

Myung-se Lee's
Nowhere to Hide

Jean-Pierre Geuens

The Grand Style

No tenet comes closer to defining Western art than "style is the man."[1] Since the Renaissance (at least), we believe that recognizable, especially recurring, formal arrangements are at the core of art and that they express the will or the soul of its creator. It doesn't matter whether the decisions that impact the work are conscious or not, the important point is that they emerge from this artist alone. Almost as notable is the notion that style, as Susan Sontag puts it, is "never something merely 'decorative,'" that it is inserted rather in the very core of what we see and is thus "an organic aspect" of the work.[2] Seen in this light, film style refers to the selection process that simultaneously articulates what manifests itself and how we see it.[3] In this essay, I will first recall the historical difficulty of the Hollywood cinema in acknowledging "significant form" as a major contributor to successful moviemaking.[4] Then, using some contemporary mainstream examples from the international cinema, I will argue that the technocratic momentum in the industry has induced in many films a surprising inversion of the traditional dominance of content over form.

If style is indeed the mark of the artist, why has it not always been recognized? First of all, in the performing arts, the author is at times reluctant to share the limelight. Voltaire, for example, insisted that "the focus [of a play] must remain in the lines that are spoken, not in the décor. The staging, the spectacle, the position of the actors, their acting, are necessary but they should add beauty to the play only when they contribute to its subject."[5] More specifically he warned against the use on the stage of "graves, black drapery, scaffolds, ladders, physical action, bodies being carried away . . . ," anything that could swing the attention away from his words.[6] Similarly, Richard Wagner, despite his public embrace of *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the working together of libretto, music, singing, staging, décor, costumes, and lighting to achieve a single emotional response in the audience—remained deeply suspicious of anyone whose talent could possibly outshine his own.[7] As a result, there were no great Bayreuth productions prior to his death or, to be more precise, prior to that of his watchful widow, Cosima.

Film Quarterly, Vol. 58, Issue 4, pages 27-38. ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2005 by The Regents of the University of California.
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On a loftier level, many nineteenth-century poets and essayists, as M. H. Abrams puts it, "began to think of the mind of the artist as interposed between the world of sense and the work of art."[8] For Emerson, Wordsworth, Carlyle and others, the world, nature, was infinitely beautiful in itself. As a result, Emerson cautioned artists to leave the closeted world of art and pay more attention to what awaited them in the great outdoors. "Away with your nonsense of oils and easels, of marble and chisels," he harangued them, "except to open your eyes to . . . the eternal picture which nature paints in the street."[9] If art was to be used at all, it was enough, John Ruskin concurred, to paint "things as they are."[10] At best, the role of art was to enlighten readers and viewers about nature, to advertise God's creation, not substitute itself for it.

Finally, the realist credo in the arts embodied a similar rebuke of stylistic options. In line with the new bourgeois spirit, many realist artists rejected the harmonious and idealized forms of classicism because of their association with the former aristocratic regime. They embraced instead a straightforward rendition of more anecdotal material. For Ortega y Gasset, the result was not a positive one. "During the 19th century artists proceeded in all too impure a fashion," he wrote, "they reduced the strictly aesthetic elements to a minimum and let the work consist almost entirely in a fiction of human realities."[11] This did not mean that writers and painters were suddenly able to get rid of style all together, far from it. It only meant that they chose to activate a style that minimized the visibility of the techniques they employed.

In the cinema, Voltaire's argument that theatrics are acceptable only when they support the story became the founding axiom of Hollywood filmmaking. I believe two circumstances help explain this fundamental distrust of style. Firstly, many Hollywood productions were but modern melodramas owing much to nineteenth-century illusionist aesthetics. Somehow characters and actions had to be seen as self-sufficient. The staging, shooting, cutting, etc., served merely as scaffolding: anything beyond that was considered a distracting filter, a mediation that could hurt the box office.[12] Secondly, once the industrial mode of production was established in Hollywood, brash individualism was rejected in favor of collaboration between all the creative participants. But far from suggesting a collective at work, teamwork was in fact a psychological carrot aimed at securing the best effort and the loyalty of workers at a time when many industrial workers were considering unionization, as well as pushing for social and political reform. Although Frederick Taylor's proposal to pay higher wages for men willing to be brought up to "a state of maximum efficiency" had met with some success in large industrial plants, more was needed when the final output depended on fewer workers whose jobs were closely interrelated.[13] "A man," an industrial psychologist suggested in 1920, "works for money to live but his greatest desire is for 'Self-Expression,' and an overwhelming desire to count among his fellow-men, to be somebody other than an unidentifiable human unit in an industrial organization."[14] In response, Elton Mayo and others advised management to implement cooperation between workers, as that alone would give them at once a sense of personal accomplishment and of belonging to a group, thus making "coercion from above" unnecessary.[15] The overall idea was to convince workers that they were not just chipping stones but building a cathedral. The scheme succeeded: good wages and the experience of working together on a joint creative effort decisively beat back any desire by the membership of the different guilds and unions to contest the right of management to decide what films were being made and in what manner they would be produced.

This stratagy thus explains why Hollywood luminaries endlessly chant the merits of collaboration, between directors and cinematographers, between cinematographers and camera operators, between camera operators and focus pullers, etc., all the way down the line. Somehow, the film couldn't have been made without the unique skills of all the participants. And, on a larger scale, the strategy reinforced the idea (at least during the heyday of the studios) that no department should shine at the expense of others. All technical departments should put themselves at the service of the story: the best cinematography, editing, sound, or set design is the one you don't notice. Even when the work itself obviously contradicted this philosophy, the technicians were bound to reiterate the commonplace. If the camerawork "overshadows the telling of the story, it is poor [cinematics]." Camera movement "focuses the attention of the audience on the mechanical rather than upon the story, and confuses instead of clarifies the issue." "When settings receive uncommon notice the drama is defective," and so on.[16] Even directors contributed to this occluding of style in their own work—for example Otto Preminger, who once declared that "the ideal picture is a picture where you don't notice the director, where you never are aware that the director did anything deliberately."[17] As for George Cukor, he suggested that in his

case, "directorial style must be largely the absence of style."[18]

This said, style is far from ignored by cinema's historians, if nothing else because it helps structure vast material into coherent and manageable wholes. What we encounter in their work are large stylistic categories such as Soviet montage, German expressionism, or film noir. Such artistic movements emerge on the artistic scene because, in Nikolai Bukharin's words, "[they embody] the current psychology and ideology; [they express] those feelings and thoughts, those moods and beliefs, those impressions, those current forms of thought that 'are in the air.'"[19] Typically, each individual school deploys a host of intertwined formal figures, some of them too unorthodox to be easily incorporated into more mainstream work. But style is also noted when a technique is introduced apart from a movement. Examples include Griffith's crosscutting, and the dramatic chiaroscuro lighting originated by Alvin Wyckoff in *The Cheat* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1915). Here the technique is quickly adopted everywhere because of its positive impact on general storytelling. Historically then, much attention has been paid to period styles, genre styles, even single visual schemes.

Style is thus, more often than not, located in techniques. Yet, as Alexandre Astruc knowingly remarked, "one has to be naïve to imagine that the systematic use of an 18.5mm lens will make things any different from what they are."[20] Robert Bresson put it even more pithily: "Style: all that is not technique."[21] But what else is there? Certainly it did not occur to many at the time to find it in the staging of Hollywood B movies. Yet this is what the *Cahiers du Cinéma* did when they began to praise these films in opposition to the traditional French cinema, which they rejected as stale, stodgy, academic, and literary. The B cinema of Hollywood, in contrast, offered a "direct engagement with reality," a different "idea of man," and an "art of action."[22] In this cinema, people talked less and did more. Westerns, musicals, and gangster films in particular were singled out as the best representatives of this modern, more visceral cinema.

In putting so much emphasis on B movies, the critics of the *Cahiers* made two important points. Firstly, they elevated films that were visually stimulating, in opposition to the French *tradition de qualité* that merely reproduced a story on the screen without adding anything purely filmic to it.[23] And then, in response to the argument that these B-movie directors had no control over what happened in pre- or post-production, and thus were not full-fledged filmmakers in the traditional sense, they responded with the concept of mise en scène. In the theater, mise en scène refers to the work of the director on the stage minus the text, that is to say, the performance of the actors, their posture, their placement in relationship to one another, their costumes, their movements, the pacing of the lines, the sets, the props, and the lighting. With film, mise en scène would also include the camera position, its height, angle, perspective, and possible movement. The work of directors, in other words, could be observed in what took place between the cuts. In *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), to take a seminal example for the *Cahiers,* the mob has arrested the saloon owner, played by Joan Crawford. The saloon itself is now burning. In a long shot, the camera is pointed toward the burning structure. Mercedes McCambridge, who plays Crawford's rival in the film, is seen looking away at the fire, her back to the camera. She slowly backs away from it, getting closer to the camera. At the last moment, she turns around and her face, now in close-up, radiates an almost sexual pleasure at her rival's demise. Most directors would have cut from the fire to a shot of her looking at it, and the film would then move on to the next scene. By delaying the revelation, by building up McCambridge's turn to the camera, Ray made a move that brought attention to mise en scène.

The *Cahiers* critics, as Barrett Hodsdon puts it, thus "recognized the possibility of the camera deliberately adopting a precise vantage point to scan the fictive world over and above its mere storytelling function."[24] They accurately pinpointed that "what moves us in a shot . . . is not only what it gives us to see directly, what is staged, but the presence of a tension between what is seen and the agency that regulates that view."[25] That tension is what style is all about. It infers a dialectical relationship at work within the image. And the presence of that tension inevitably points to some authorial activity. Unsurprisingly, the critics ended up locating in the director's work the true essence of the film, and insisted that it expressed—in the best of cases, at least—the consistent viewpoint of a unique personality.

For all the excitement generated by specific film techniques and mise en scène, they did not alter the core operations in filmmaking. Movies continued to be made very much the same way they had always been made. This long run, however, has come to an abrupt end. Everywhere we look today, new technological developments are burrowing their way into the very core of the creative process. Their ubiquity, their

cheapness (in some cases at least), their peerless capability to work out visual miracles, the empowerment they offer their users, have irresistibly pushed filmmakers to think of their work differently. The making of a movie used to follow a simple, well-known, rarely deviated from logical sequence. A camera truck would be loaded with a Mitchell camera, an array of lenses, some spotlights, some floods, a dolly, and some grip equipment. The film stock would be the only color negative film made by Kodak. It would be processed and printed by the lab. The editors would get the dailies and start cutting. The cut negative would match the final version of the workprint. A sound mix would take place. An answer print would smooth out colors and lighting levels. The subsequent release prints would be shipped off to the theaters.

Today, in contrast, the path is far from clear. Should we shoot with film or embrace digital filmmaking? What's best for this project? What are the ramifications in post-production? If going with film, do we go with anamorphic, Super 35mm, or 1.85? Which Panaflex is best for what we intend to do? Or is Arriflex the way to go? But which one: the 435, the 535, or the Arricam? Do we go with 3 or 4 perfs pulldown? If going with digital, do we shoot HD or not? Which format? Do we go back to film later on? Do we need special attachments to give our digital output a film look? What about optical tools that create a unique effect, such as the squishy lens manufactured by Clairmont Camera? In lighting, each year ingenious refinements to the old standards are exhibited at Showbiz Expo. Kino Flos, egg-crating devices, lights floating in space: the choice is yours. Steadicams, of course, are omnipresent. Jibs and cranes are remote controlled. Motion-tracking devices calculate the exact movement of any apparatus, then duplicate it for miniatures or CGI purposes in post-production. Wires, as well as manned or unmanned helicopters, take the operation to the sky. In film, Kodak offers no less than 12 color negative stocks to choose from and keeps improving each one as if they were software programs. Even the labs offer options galore: pushing, flashing, cross-processing, and bleach-blocking. Special baths for obtaining a unique effect can be ordered at a price. And there are of course new printing stocks to take a look at.

Considering all this, it is clear there is no longer a single protocol for all to follow. Each film becomes a unique event, and it is up to producers, directors, cinematographers, and specialists in other areas to figure out which path is best for this project. Issue after issue of *American Cinematographer* contains interviews with directors of photography who give us their reasoning for their choice of particulars. In other words, what was of relative importance before—the equipment and the technology—has become paramount in the mind of all participants. More importantly still, the selection process is directly connected to giving the film a look, a unique appearance that will enhance its marketability. Whereas in the past hundreds of films would go into production without one or would share a genre look with a large group of films, to have a unique look is now paramount for any production, even low-budget ones. To take a single example, Curtis Wehr, a director of photography featured in a Kodak ad, insists that each one of his projects "dictates a different style of lighting and camera movement."[26]

The look is, for the most part, formulated in production, through the process of shot selection, composition, lighting, etc. What is new here is the lassoing of stylistic figures on the loose and their corralling into a comprehensive menu. Something akin to Christian Metz's *Grande Syntagmatique* can indeed be easily devised for the mode of production.[27] There is a space, a character, the camera can be close or far, the character can move; the camera can be lower or higher, it can look at the scene tilted, it can zoom, and it too can move. The space can be entirely sharp or partly out of focus. The perspective can be stretched or shrunk. And that's about it. Interestingly, as the stylistic figures were methodically classified, they progressively lost the familiar connotations they once carried: for example, low-key lighting as particularly suitable for drama, or Dutch angle to suggest that something is not quite right. The shift is far from universal, but the radical aesthetics of music videos have definitely had an impact on mainstream filmmaking. So, instead of a loosely coded rhetoric, we now have detached figures that can be selected at will within the database to engender any effect whatsoever. Illustrating this point well is Alan Caso, a cinematographer for the TV show *Six Feet Under*. For that program, Caso decided to be

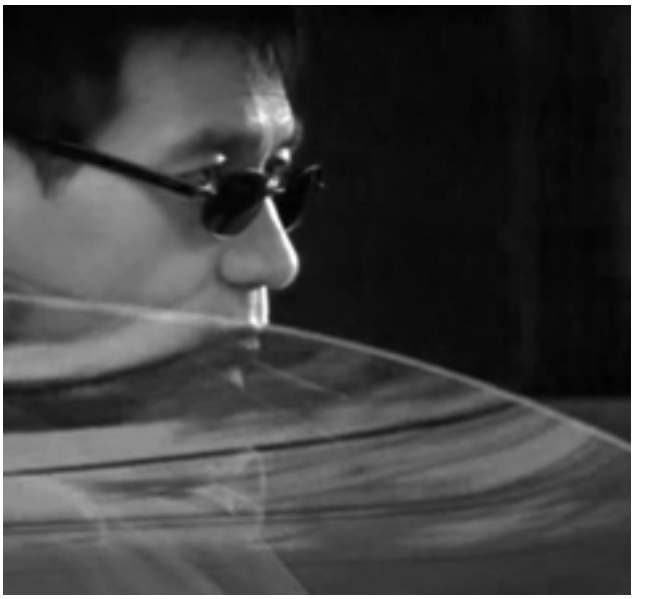
> very aggressive with lens choices—really forcing frames in composition, having people crammed on the edge of the frame, and forcing kinetic or dynamic relationships with everyone involved in the shot. We got the camera down low; we used ceiling pieces when we could, avoiding over-the-top lighting. We often use practical lights or lights

> through the windows. Also we avoid moving the camera too much. That's a trend in TV these days, so we wanted to stay away from it. We mix really long lenses with wide lenses, but we never use mid-length lenses, and we go for oblique angles quite a bit.[28]

What is clear from this example, and most films going into production nowadays follow suit, is that the look precedes what happens on the set. Means have become ends. In other words, the mode of production, having shed its last vestiges of mystery, has transformed itself into a fully rational operation. The creative process, as a result, is now largely construed as a taxonomic activity.

The look of the film is completed in post-production. And it is here that digital technology has had the most impact. First of all, colorizing, now a standard operation in the digital intermediate process, allows the colorist or the cinematographer to spruce up hue, brightness, contrast, and saturation—not only in the overall image, but in each of its components. This capability brings to the filmmaker a complete, painterly control over the picture. In like manner, various internal software and plug-ins have made possible such effects as speed ramping, that is to say, the fashionable acceleration or deceleration of motion, e.g., the bullet in the original *Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999). Using this technique, space and time can be contracted and lengthened at will. Finally, compositing, with programs such as Flame and Inferno, permits the construction of entirely new images made up of successive (photographic or computer-generated) layers placed on top of one another: the sky could emerge from one picture, the house from a second, the lighted windows in the house from a third, the bird that flies from left to right from a fourth, etc. All of this should make clear that filmmaking has undergone a shift of seismic importance. Put another way, it is now certain that the image, to recall André Bazin's seminal insight about two kinds of cinema, has decidedly triumphed over reality.[29]

In the trenches, the complete mastery of the image has produced a turn toward the cool, the flashy, the beautiful, the image that speaks for itself. The attraction for beautiful surfaces is of course not new. Roland Barthes, for instance, once observed that when the classical Dutch painters abandoned religious themes for the secular world, they strived "to add secondary vibrations to the object's appearance."[30] Oysters were not on display to be eaten, but to be looked at and admired; wine glasses were painted because they refracted light; well-waxed wooden floors and furniture served "to lubricate the gaze of the viewer."[31] Unsurprisingly, music videos and commercials—two fields concerned with selling commodities to consumers—are similarly dedicated to seducing the eye. But the impact in fiction film has been tremendous as well. In *Nowhere to Hide* (Myung-se Lee, 1999), a flashy gangster film made in Korea, the best sequence involves the killing of a businessman by a professional assassin and the beating of his assistant by the gunman's thugs. The scene is accompanied by a Beatles song. What is striking about the sequence is the punch given to each image, the vim that enhances each surface. Attention is not on the humanity (or inhumanity) of the characters, nor on the logistics of the murder. The filmmaker takes for granted that we know the genre, that we know more or less what's going to happen, and that fact liberates him from having to pay too much attention to storytelling details. For instance, it takes a while for the narrative to develop. Rather, screen time is given to what Roman Jakobson called "retarding devices," that is to say, incidental action without bearing on the story.[32] Their purpose in this case is to keep pure intellection at bay and make us experience instead the sensuality of well-designed pictures. The non-essential but stylistically interesting shots include a motorcyclist driving his bike, a young couple holding hands, a worker carrying some sheeting over his head, a little girl skipping



Nowhere to Hide

The assassin waits.

A small girl waits for rain.

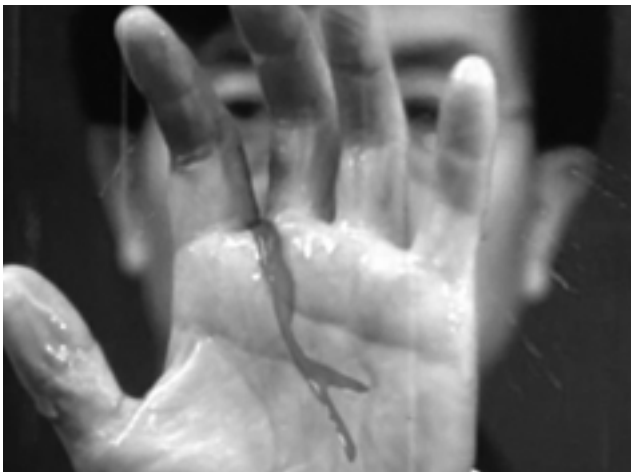
down a flight of steps. The bad guys are introduced in their car, waiting for their target to show up, but we don't know where the car is in relation to the rest of the scenery, and we get only tantalizing glimpses of the gangsters.

What makes the sequence irresistible in terms of today's stylistics echoes what Ortega said of Velasquez. The artist "no longer fixes his attention upon the object as such but upon its surface, where the light falls and is reflected. . . ."[33] In our case, what attracts the filmmaker and viewer is the shine of the car's metal, the reflections off the windshield, a glimpse in the rear view mirror, the pattern created by leaves as a gust of wind blows them around, the wetness of the rain on the pavement, the half-circle made by the camera as it glides over the polished hood of the car, a side-door window that slides up as the rain becomes heavy, the sunglasses worn by the killer that bring out parallel images of the outside world. The killing itself is not actually seen, just intuited: the black nylon of an umbrella that is slashed open by a sharp blade, faces briefly confronting one another, some blood dripping from an extended hand, more blood leaking among raindrops on the businessman's face, his body falling on the wet pavement. To quote Barthes again, "Each object is accompanied by visual adjectives that mark off its reality; substance remains hidden under its thousand appearances."[34] Nothing is real here. It's all about looks, about people looking cool and the image itself being cool. This plasticity is what Régis Debray conceptualizes as the Visual. For him, the Visual "does not communicate anything but itself, it has desire for nothing but itself."[35] The cool trend that started 50 years ago with Jean-Pierre Melville has now reached its nadir. The medium is no longer about the stories themselves, it's about telling them in a visually seductive manner. It's about the pure pleasure of superbly elegant images. Through it all, the emphasis is on formal manipulation, on tweaking the image, on styling it, on flushing it with colorful aphrodisiacs and powerful steroids, all in the hope of wooing the viewers.

The waiting reflected.

Post-production too has been radicalized through the introduction of non-linear editing systems (Avid, Final Cut Pro, Premiere). With the Moviolas or the Kems—the tools of the past—the mechanical advance of the film combined with the sound of the machinery had something magical about it. It was almost as if the beating heart of the machine made it possible for the scene to present itself anew, to come

Deep focus and oblique angles



The businessman holds up his bleeding hand.

alive again. What appeared on the screen of these editing machines was not an image but the original living moment. To edit meant to bring that world back to life, to share for a moment the breathing space of the characters, to be overtaken by their presence. On the computer screen, however, the images are not windows onto a real world, they do not conjure anything beyond themselves. In fact they never come alive at all. They are opaque from the start. They are but colorful rectangles with formal characteristics, sharing a flat space with the rest of the graphic interface. Their content can be animated but does not come alive. The images may be virtual in their capacity, but they are inert matter in their essence. No wonder then that editors intuitively feel the need to juggle them around. For these images have been cut off from their roots and are now but dead objects that serve as collage material.

Another factor involves the interface itself. Whereas editors used to work one shot at a time, pondering the advance carefully, thinking linearly, moving the narrative forward in a horizontal manner, today one click of the mouse brings up as a list or as icons all the image choices available for each scene. On the monitor, the little pictures can therefore be made to hang next to one another as paintings in a gallery and it is up to the visitor to make something of the offering. In my view, this panoptical visibility, this seeing-it-all-at-once has made fragmentary editing an irresistible temptation. In other words, the interface invites moving the mouse and clicking wildly, searching for visually satisfying combinations, and experimenting with shot linkage far beyond the requirements of the narrative. For Lev Manovich, this is an essential difference between old and new media. In the old media, the paradigm of narrative alternatives was not visible, while the articulation of the text, its syntagm, was. In new media, he suggests, it is the other way around: "Database (the paradigm) is given material existence, while narrative (the syntagm) is dematerialized. Paradigm is privileged, syntagm is downplayed. Paradigm is real; syntagm virtual."[36]

To illustrate this, let us take a look at another gangster film, made in Thailand this time, *Bangkok Dangerous* (Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang, 1999). This is a very low-budget film, probably even low for Thailand, so there is no time or money for beautiful images. Most scenes are probably shot on the run, without careful planning, rehearsals, or traditional coverage. The scene I am focusing upon takes place in a public bathroom. The yellowish space is

A final extreme close-up.

A murder sequence in *Bangkok Dangerous* presents violence through style.

dingy and drably lighted by flickering fluorescent bulbs. A gang member is shot dead by the protagonist avenging the killing of his girlfriend. What makes the scene compelling is certainly not the characters, as they lack depth, nor is it the images, which are rather crude. It is rather the jittery cutting—one tendency of digital editing. Far from the traditional progression from a master that provides the geography of the scene to closer viewpoints that pick up details of the action, the editing stokes up the haptic camera style. Visually indeed, the material is made up of mostly handheld medium-shots that rush us through the action rather than letting us look at it from a privileged point of view. We are thrown rapid volleys of visual information that give us a sense of what's going on without the clarity or the time to digest it. Rather than clarifying the action, the editing intensifies the overall commotion.

The scene's first shot is a close-up of a lizard hanging from the ceiling. Immediately following are four pans, each crossing the man's back from right to left, each only slightly different from the others. Each action of the man—rolling up his sleeves, splashing water on his face, pulling himself back from the sink to dry himself—is seen through a quick series of shots, often in motion, often Dutch, without clear beginnings, ends, or focus, and from all angles and perspectives. There is no secure stage line here to help us keep our bearing. The man then moves his fingers on his throat, feeling the deep scratches left there by the girl he killed. One fluorescent bulb fizzles, producing at times a warmer color. Tight shot on the scratches. Quick insert of the rape in a location flooded with blue light. Cut to a blurry, unestablished hallway painted red. Quick shots of the protagonist, out of focus, rushing forward in that red space. Fast jump cuts as the gangster leaves the sink for the urinal. Tight insert of water dripping from the faucet. The man leans his hand on the wall in front of the urinal: three shots of his watch, each time a little closer. Two tight shots accompany the protagonist as he rushes toward the man relieving himself. Side shot of a gun. Over the shoulder of the protagonist, the gun fires, a flash of bright light, the man falls. Multiple shots of the two men. Close-up of the gun. Gun flashes. The screen becomes red. Zoom on blood sliding from underneath the body. Multiple shots of the body and the protagonist. Back to the lizard. Green overhead shot from the lizard's POV. And so on. The scene contains over 40 shots in less than two minutes.

Thirty years ago, this scene would never have been cut this way. As Michele Pierson reminds us, editing was first and foremost a physical enterprise, consisting of "threading [the footage], syncing, marking, cutting, splicing, trimming, and gluing."[37] Film cut too fast had a hard time navigating its way through the sprockets of the editing machine and the projector and thus was used only infrequently. Jump-cutting slightly different takes or shots was not an option either. Continuity editing was still by and large the law of the land. What finally broke its back was the advent of random-access and instant playback.[38] Material could now be instantly accessed, deployed, and tried out without physically endangering the image. Through time, the technique became fashionable because it offers, quoting Jan Speckenbach, a "vision of the surroundings as extraneous, the movements as senseless and the world not as a continual process."[39] Jean-Luc Godard's jump cuts in the late 1950s thus foreshadowed a wider shift in the art, from the well-located balcony the Quattrocento had built for us to being lost in the crowd and having to fight our way through it.[40] As a result, using Pierson's words again, "a series of ever more discrete visual images and shocks" overwhelmed the smooth, linear series of views depicting a well-delineated action.[41] In the scene above, we are lost in the midst of immanent sensations. It is full of what Fred Schepisi calls "stimulus things," the rapid disorienting shifts of perspective that characterize the new editing.[42] The clarity of an action seen from a helpful external perspective has given way to a mad shuffling of the images. Clarity, continuity, and transparency, long the modus operandi

A lizard's point-of-view shot

of the dominant cinema, have given way to uncertainty, disruption, and reflexivity. Far from style being the mere scaffold of content, the action is now only a pretext to prop up style. *Monteurs en scène* have replaced *metteurs en scène*.

One way to make sense of this stylistic shift is to recall the artistic period that followed the classical age in painting: mannerism. Some analogies immediately come to mind. Primarily, both periods reject classical harmony and forms. As Arnold Hauser points out, "The objective [of classical art] is to leave out nothing essential and to dismiss from the picture of reality everything inessential, accidental, and marginal."[43] Mannerist art, to the contrary, aims to keep all in. That period and ours repudiate the notion that art transparently reflects the outside world. Both favor technical bravura, artistic virtuosity, and the arbitrariness of forms. Both originate at a time when "the boundaries between being and appearance, experience and illusion, objective statement and subjective fantasy, [have] grown blurred. . . ."[44] Both express a level of personal alienation as well as professional insecurity (the weakening of the guilds back then, the fear of job loss through computerization and runaway productions today). What Hauser writes about the seventeenth century is also valid for our days marked by globalization: "Men became aware of . . . being conditioned by the historical circumstances of their time . . . ; [as] the objective world had grown unintelligible, the identity of the self had been shattered, had grown vague and fluid."[45] Mannerist art is thus a response to personal, artistic, and social malaise. When they feel so alienated, Hauser concludes,

> men are not resigned to remaining so; they wish to have an alienating and startling effects on others. Therefore the artist not only chooses strange and startling effects, but also tries to render the most ordinary things in a startling way. The purpose is not merely to surprise and unsettle, but also to state that it is impossible to feel at home among the things of this world or make friends with them.[46]

Hauser's sympathy is clearly on the side of mannerist painters. Should we feel the same toward filmmakers whose situation and productions are similar in tone to that of their predecessors? The distinction, I believe, resides in the details. Whereas the painters selected distortion as a means to distance themselves from their society's changing values, the filmmakers embrace a technology designed just for them by the dominant economic forces. When they put it into action, they merely activate the program provided by the software. In other words, even though the technology may feel extraordinarily liberating to the user, the virtual space that opens up has already been colonized and mapped out. In that way, it is but a more refined version of bourgeois art which, to quote Adorno and Horkheimer, "hypostasized itself as a world of freedom in contrast to what was happening in the material world. . . ."[47] Far from being dissidents, the filmmakers are but the praetorians of the system. They work at enriching the raw material delivered by the photographic image. The activity itself is exciting, the results are immediate, and the exchange value of the product is increased. To sum up, digital activity in shooting and editing has transformed the making of films into an irresistible spectacle for those who make them. Yet, at the end of the day, it is not just the images that have been revamped: the filmmakers themselves, through their work, have been "rendered" into virtual capitalists.

It used to be relatively easy to distinguish good films from average or really bad ones. In the vast majority of films, little or nothing ever happened: the films just made themselves. The good films, on the other hand, had style: one could observe the creative imagination, artistry, and vision of concerned filmmakers. Today, however, the situation is far from clear. What electronics have done is make it possible for every film to claim some sort of creative activity. But is this embrace of exquisite visuals and supercharged editing the same thing as style? Some 50 years ago, Chris Marker noted that "there is a perfectibility in the nature of technology that finds no equivalent in the arts."[48] He then warned us that there are two types of cinema, and that the confusion "which makes the advances of the tool appear as that of the art is a deception on the part of those who benefit from the sleight of hand."[49] In other words, electronics can easily fool us into believing that their output is the real thing. So we must remember that it isn't so, that style cannot rise ahead of the work, that it originates still from the encounter of human beings with the material and the medium in the social and political world that surrounds it all. As Dorothea Franck puts it, "we can choose *a* style, [but] we cannot choose *our* style: we have to find it."[50] Sadly, what shows up in so many films nowadays is what Sontag calls "stylization," which, she says, comes along when content appears exhausted.[51]

When the British painter Joshua Reynolds appealed to the young artists of his day to follow his example—paint only inspiring biblical or historical events and beautify imperfect subjects so as to produce an elevated response on the part of the viewers—he called it, somewhat inappropriately, "the grand style."[52] Today's grand style cares little or nothing for content. The look is all. It claims the center-stage position. It insists on the limelight. Yet the flashes that are produced are no longer personal to the artist, they belong to the software or, more generally, to the ideology of cool. For a long time, style could be seen as the salvation of cinema against the banality of traditional filmmaking. Today this royal road has brought us to a cul-de-sac. Where do we go from here?

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Notes

1. The Comte de Buffon quoted in Jàs Elsner, "Style," in *Critical Terms for Art History,* ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 103.
2. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Octagon, 1986), 32.
3. The Russian formalist distinction between *fabula* (the story), *szyuzhet* (the organization of that story, e.g. the flashback structure), and *style* (the flesh of the work) works well for the screenplay but, in the making of a film, I believe content is the overall material one works from and style is what subsequently happens to it.
4. For Clive Bell, "significant form" is the overall determinant of art. See Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Putnam, 1958), 17.
5. In *L'Invention de la mise en scène,* ed. Jean-Marie Piemme (Bruxelles: Labor, 1989), 14-15 (my translation).
6. In *L'Invention de la mise en scène,* 15 (my translation).
7. Suggested by Eric de Kuyper, "Une Invention méconnue du XIXème siècle: la mise en scène," *La Mise en scène,* ed. Jacques Aumont (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2000), 16.
8. In George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 55-6.
9. Quoted in Leonard, 1.
10. Quoted in Leonard, 102.
11. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature,* trans. Helene Weigel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 11.
12. For all of this, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
13. Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper, 1911), 9.
14. Quoted in Reinhard Bendix, *Work and Authority in Industry: Managerial Ideologies in the Course of Industrialization* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2001), 290.
15. Quoted in Bendix, 317.
16. All examples are taken from Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 109.
17. In V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1972), 128.
18. In Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 109.
19. Quoted in *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism,* ed. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams (New York: David McKay, 1972), 105.
20. Quoted in *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave,* ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 266.
21. Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer,* trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Quartet, 1986), 49-50.
22. Roger Leenhardt and Eric Rohmer, quoted in *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950's: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave,* 73-4.
23. See François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," in *Movies and Methods,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 225.
24. Barrett Hodsdon, "The Mystique of Mise en Scène Revisited," *Continuum,* vol. 5, no. 2 (1992): 69.
25. Emmanuel Siety, *Le Plan au commencement du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2001), 25.
26. Quoted in "On Film," in *American Cinematographer,* vol. 85, no. 1 (January, 2004): 130.
27. See Christian Metz, "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 35-65.
28. In Michael Goldman, "Fade to Black," in *Millimeter* (September, 2002), 76.
29. See "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Volume 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 23-40.
30. Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 21 (my translation).
31. Ibid. (my translation).
32. Roman Jakobson, "On Realism in Art," in *Readings in Russian Poetics,* ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystina Pomorska (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1978), 44.
33. Ortega, 119.
34. Barthes, 21 (my translation).
35. Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image: une histoire du regard en Occident* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 325 (my translation).
36. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 231.
37. Michele Pierson, "No Longer State-of-the Art: Crafting a Future for CGI," *Wide Angle,* vol. 21, no.1 (1999): 33.
38. See Pierson, 33-4.
39. Jan Speckenbach, "Match Frame and Jump Cut: A Dialectic Theory of Montage in the Digital Age," at www.keyframe.org/txt/matchframe/, 7.
40. In his book on style, David Bordwell dismisses the possibility of changes in human perception as a Lamarckian

folly. He also questions the possibility of a novel mode of perception seizing every single human being at a given moment of history. What is certain though is that, at times, a gap opens up between one's experience of the world and the traditional artistic schemata available to the artists. The figure that emerges in response to this discontinuity is adopted because it appears to be a good match for the new way of looking at things. See David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 139-48.

41. Pierson, 34.
42. Quoted in Adrian Martin, "Mise en Scène Is Dead," in *Continuum,* vol. 5, no.2, (1992): 122.
43. Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art,* trans. Eric Mosbacher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 24.
44. Hauser, 29.
45. Ibid., 50.
46. Quoted in *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism,* 414.
47. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightement,* trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1993), 135.
48. Chris Marker, "Hollywood: Sur place," in André Bazin et al., *Cinema 53: A travers le monde* (Paris: Cerf, 1954), 38 (my translation).
49. Ibid. (my translation).
50. Dorothea Franck, "Style and Innocence—Lost, Regained —and Lost Again?" in *The Question of Style in Philosophy and the Arts,* ed. Caroline Van Eck, James McAllister, Renée Van de Vall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 230.
51. Sontag, 19.
52. See the fourth discourse in Joshua Reynolds, *Seven Discourses on Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

Abstract Film style used to be the preserve of the artist. It made it possible to distinguish good filmmaking from mainstream work. Today, however, new technologies enable even beginners to load their images with stimuli of all kinds. This article explores the question of how this "grand style" is different, and what it portends for cinema's future.

Reviews

In the Cut

Director: Jane Campion. Producers: Laurie Parker and Nicole Kidman. Writers: Campion and Susanna Moore. Cinematographer: Dion Beebe. Music: Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson. Screen Gems.

Against the backdrop of Jane Campion's earlier major films, *An Angel at My Table, The Piano, Portrait of a Lady,* and *Holy Smoke!,* her latest, *In the Cut,* should be familiar territory.[1] It continues and amplifies recurrent themes and plot patterns: narratives of white middle-class women forcibly held and threatened by male violence and socially sanctioned power; and dramas of psycho-sexual entanglement in which the protagonists' strong wills, romantic yearnings, and transgressive desires exist in painful tension with their social and physical vulnerability. But *In the Cut* also departs significantly from the earlier films, most notably in terms of setting and genre—leaving the accustomed Campion territory of Anglo Australia and a high literary mode for New York City and the pop culture associations of the slasher/thriller film. At the same time, in terms of style, the film's dynamic and expressive cinematography fragments the gritty urban setting, taking the narrative further into dreamscape, into the interiority of female experience. This double-move both toward and away from mainstream cinema is a bold one, and overtaxed an often tenuous public appreciation for Campion's films. *In the Cut* disappeared rapidly from North American theaters, even in cinema-sophisticated cities like Seattle and Vancouver, B.C., where it ran for only a few weeks.

Much of the overt difficulty that viewers and critics had with *In the Cut* seems to have come from the film's apparent genre identity as an erotic thriller. Its graphic images of violence and sex and its explicit sexual talk distracted or confused reviewers who could not reconcile their expectations of Jane Campion with what they took to be sensationalist commercial material, a perception undoubtedly strengthened by the distribution and marketing of the film in mainstream theaters. And, indeed, the bare plot and character elements that the film shares largely with its source novel, by Susanna Moore, are sensational, even lurid at times.

"Que Sera Sera"

A teacher, Frannie Avery (Meg Ryan), and her sister, Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who lives above the Baby Doll Lounge—replete with exotic dancers, prostitutes, and pimps—talk and fantasize about sex. Frannie carries on inappropriate meetings with one of her students, Cornelius Webb (Sharrieff Pugh), who is fascinated with serial killer John Wayne Gacy. In the basement of the seedy Red Turtle bar where Frannie meets Cornelius, she watches, shocked but fascinated, as a shadowed man receives fellatio. In the darkness of the dimly lit space, she can see only a tattooed three of spades on the man's wrist. Frannie is subsequently drawn into a steamy involvement with a detective, Giovanni A. Malloy (Mark Ruffalo), who is investigating the murder of a young woman, unnamed parts of whose body are found in the garden below Frannie's apartment. Although Frannie grows increasingly suspicious that Malloy, who bears an incriminating three of spades tattoo on his wrist, is the serial killer, she continues to risk herself with him even past the point where she discovers Pauline's severed head in a blood-splattered bathroom—a genre icon worthy of the most extreme slasher film. Other men in the story, including Cornelius and John Graham (a disordered former lover and hapless stalker), present themselves as potential suspects in the ongoing murders and help create a claustrophobic atmosphere of uncertainty. But when Frannie's suspicions of Malloy—which turn out to be mistaken—flash to conviction, she impulsively surrenders her safety to Malloy's partner, Rodriguez (Nick D'Amici)—belatedly seen to be another bearer of the incriminating three of spades tattoo. He promptly drives her off to a blood-red lighthouse. There—in a full reversal of the novel's ending, which has Frannie passively fading into death—Frannie unexpectedly kills the psychotic Rodriguez with Malloy's pistol and, blood-soaked and barefoot on the

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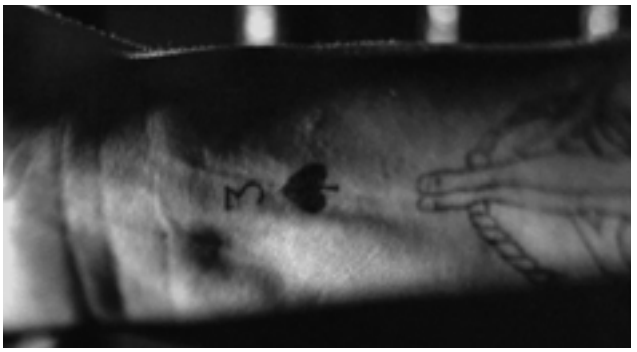


Incriminating signifier

early morning streets, makes her way back to her apartment and Malloy.

Pervaded with images of blood, body parts, naked bodies, vulnerable females at risk, and opaque and disordered males, *In the Cut* obviously shares elements with films whose primary appeal is to the male viewer and the frisson of sex and violence. However, while the film is frequently both erotic and disturbing, its narrative structure, cinematic technique, and affect have little in common with slasher/thriller films, which depend upon building suspense, moments of horror, and complex gender identifications. Where the slasher/thriller genre can be seen as a popular culture form that enacts and expresses culturally repressed male psychic conflicts, Campion has taken the elements from Moore's novel—itself a departure from the conventional serial killer tale—and used them to frame another kind of narrative altogether: one that renders a psychic landscape of female desire and romantic longing surviving in a male-dominated urban wasteland. This juxtaposition of narrative elements unquestionably surprises and disrupts viewers' expectations, but we argue that it also creates a powerfully multivalent text that successfully extends Campion's ongoing exploration of the female subject.

Mirrored images: Frannie and Pauline

At the level of plot, Campion has profoundly shifted the focus of Moore's novel by turning Pauline into Frannie's half-sister and creating a family history as psychological background and motivator. Both women are in emotional thrall to the results of their father's serial marrying and abandonment of five women. The narrative is partly structured around their scenes together, representing the two women as an isolated emotional unit, sharing intimacy and bravely supporting one another. Pauline, promiscuously pursuing lovers, yearns for the cultural norm of love and marriage: "I want to get married for my Mom." She gives Frannie a large charm bracelet, identified as a "courtship fantasy," and both women pay special attention to the charm that has a baby carriage with a token baby inside. Pauline says to Frannie, with conviction, "You should have a baby and a man." She encourages Frannie to pursue the relationship with Malloy. Frannie, on the other hand, lives hesitantly, sublimating her desires into "a passion" for the words she collects and the erotic art that decorates her walls. Her moment of fascinated sexual gazing at Rodriguez/Malloy receiving fellatio—inverting the cinematic male gaze—triggers her involvement with Malloy. In sum, then, the family history that Campion constructs frames the charged relationship between Frannie and Malloy as Frannie attempts to reconcile her mother's sad courtship narrative with her own desire and fear of loving a man. As Campion explicitly states in her DVD commentary, *In the Cut* is a love story—albeit one that offers far more complex effects than the conventional pleasures of Hollywood romance.

At the level of technique and cinematic representation, *In the Cut* works largely within the norms of art cinema—more so even than most of Campion's other films. The opening title sequence offers a montage of scrawled faces and illegible graffiti seen through fences, which establish urban desolation, but also suggest themes of psychic disturbance and repression. The most striking and thematically explicit image is a quick shot of an urban wall graffito: a stylized line-drawing with a doubled profile of a woman's head, energetically facing in two directions, Janus style, her hair swept back as if in motion. Superimposed over the center of the image by a perspective-flattening long lens is a one-way street sign pointing to the right. Through the entire sequence the sound track plays an off-key version of "Que Sera Sera," a song whose lyrics work through the figures authorized to respond to a young girl's constructed

dreams—mother, teacher, sweetheart—all of them counseling the refrain of passivity, a willingness to go one way: "What will be, will be."

Throughout the film, the complex mise en scène, elaborately stylized cinematography, and elliptical editing create an image-rich, even cluttered, diegesis, charged with overt thematic meanings and suggestive effects. Frequent tight close-ups and rack-focusing emphasize the emotional content of faces, and leave backgrounds as blurred, abstract shapes. Almost every shot in the film has an element of bright red in clothing, objects, or background. We see scraps and pieces of interiors. A montage sequence in the Baby Doll Lounge shows quick images of naked, dancing women, gazing men, a small baby sitting in the background, and close-ups of Pauline twisting half awake on her bed. In Pauline's apartment we see through mazes of blurred hanging artificial flowers—echoing the petal-filled garden outside Frannie's apartment, where, at the beginning of the film, we catch brief glimpses of women holding and grooming one another, and a serene Asian man practicing Tai Chi. Frannie's apartment is a clutter of photos, scraps of words, and hanging mobiles. Outdoors we see quick, dislocated shots of crowded streets and subway trains and stations in which strong iconic images appear and disappear before Frannie's eyes: women mysteriously running away through the crowd in flight from something unnamed; a large bright red floral wreath inscribed with "MOM"; a tee shirt inscribed with "Kisses"—itself an echo of the Gabriel Garcia Lorca poem Frannie has just seen in the subway train: "The still waters of your mouth under a thicket of kisses."

Through the otherworldly subway scenes, which help to demarcate the narrative structure, Frannie arrives at different scenes without a sense of having traveled. Rather than providing spatial continuity within the narrative as one might expect, these scenes rather help to dramatize the turmoil of Frannie's psyche. In one striking shot, she sees through the moving subway window an isolated image worthy of Fellini, for its rich strangeness: a young woman stands on the subway platform, in full wedding dress, immobilized, staring fixedly and sadly into empty space. When Rodriguez drives Frannie off to the killing ground of his lighthouse, Campion cuts this same image unexpectedly into Frannie's retrospective stare out of the car window.

The literary analog to this kind of visual flow of images is, of course, stream of consciousness narration, an analog that Campion makes explicit by transforming an intertextual hint from Moore's novel into an extended verbal and visual allusion to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. That the entire diegesis directly images or indirectly reflects Frannie's psychological process is signaled in the opening scene of the film, in which Pauline's bemused gaze at the "petal storm" in Frannie's garden gives way to Frannie's half-awake gaze. As she later says to Pauline, she confuses the exterior drifting petals with the snow in her interior dream/thoughts of her mother's story.

Subway bride

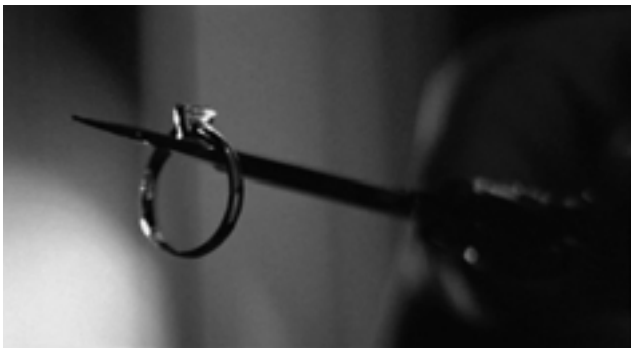
This surreal black-and-white "dream," which plays in three segments throughout the course of the film, represents the romantic illusions and the dangers of male betrayal that hold Frannie in thrall. The first segment, as Frannie lies sleepily in bed, shows a pastoral, almost nineteenth-century skating scene centering on a young woman. In the immediate right foreground, however, a leather gloved hand belonging to an unseen male watcher clenches ominously. As the watcher moves into the frame, he becomes a handsome, vital skater—whose skate cuts a blood red track into the ice. The second segment enacts Frannie's account to Pauline of their father's improbable proposal to Frannie's mother: how their father's first fiancée grew jealous and threw the engagement ring down; and how Frannie's father danced her mother out to the middle of the ice and offered her the same

Frannie's defining narrative

ring. Frannie concludes: "He killed her: when he left she went crazy with grief." In the final sequence, as an inebriated Frannie mourns Pauline's gruesome murder, the now almost cartoon-style dream shows the father careening across the ice with a comically irresponsible look on his face. Shockingly, his skates smoothly slice through legs and thighs, leaving them in parts. As the skates then aim at the neck of the mother helplessly recumbent on the ice, Frannie jolts out of her reverie.

What the dream sequence carries in a surreal, almost comic form, the main narrative offers in gruesomely explicit detail with the staring severed heads and limbs of Rodriguez's victims. And both dream and waking life, of course, enact the familiar Bluebeard story that was explicitly represented in the pantomime shadow play in *The Piano,* and symbolically enacted in Stewart's "decapitation" of Ada's little finger. In *Portrait of a Lady,* Bluebeard is again figured in Osmond's entrapment of Isabel. Here, in *In the Cut,* Bluebeard is not named, but is even more fully enacted. As the narrative proceeds, we gradually learn that the killer, finally revealed to be Rodriguez, has been forcefully plying his victims with a "prenuptial" engagement ring before strangling and dismembering them. In the final scene with Frannie, he plays "The Look of Love" on his boom-box, waltzes her about as her father had danced with her mother, and represents himself as a sensitive, lonely lover. He then abruptly presents the engagement ring hung on knife point: "Frannie, will you marry me. Put on the ring! Take the fucking ring!" At this moment in the narrative, as the astonishingly surreal red lighthouse glows against the underlit George Washington Bridge, the symbolic dream themes of Frannie's father and the "real" diegesis merge together. The serial killer story thus becomes charged with mythic power.

Together, the murder story and the family history form a narrative matrix that gives Frannie's relationship with Malloy broadened thematic reference and supercharges its emotional intensity. Considered by themselves, the issues Malloy poses for Frannie—the mix of sexual and emotional attraction, misunderstanding, hurt feelings, and mistrust—are the psychological components of a typical romance. Malloy's second appearance in the narrative is literally as a dream lover in Frannie's sexual fantasies. But as she imagines him watching her masturbate, the boundary between fantasy and reality blurs. When they actually make love, Malloy is extraordinarily sensitive to female pleasure and at key moments in the film Malloy tends to Frannie: taking care of her after Pauline's murder, returning her sandal to her bare foot, and washing her feet in the bath (feet and shoes clearly being iconic in Campion's films). But Malloy is also frequently opaque to Frannie, and at other crucial moments participates in a crude homosocial alliance with his partner, Rodriguez, that leaves Frannie isolated and vulnerable. Frannie's fear that Malloy is a liar, that he can't be trusted to separate from his former wife—conventional fears of the way romance can be psychically damaging—rises to fever pitch with the specific suspicion that he is the actual serial killer. In the powerful scene before she falls into Rodriguez's hands, Frannie's doubt has been assuaged by Malloy's compassionate tenderness toward her; she dresses in Pauline's red dress, dominates Malloy by handcuffing him, and takes her pleasure of him, by only allowing him to watch "in the cut." When she discovers her



"Will you marry me, Frannie?"

Mirrored images: Frannie and Malloy

missing baby-carriage charm suspiciously sequestered in his jacket, her suspicions of him as a man fuse with her fear of him as a potential killer. While this fusion is psychologically credible, it also clearly works metaphorically. If Malloy has appropriated her dream of love and marriage for his own needs, he is psychically dangerous and not to be trusted. In the generically heightened narrative, Rodriguez represents that psychic danger. The nightmare version of the courting male, he romances you, marries you, kills and fragments you.

At the level of plot, the narrative unambiguously confirms Malloy's innocence of the murders. When Frannie tearfully asks Malloy, who has just supported her through the horror of discovering Pauline, "Did you kill my sister?," it is important to see—retrospectively—that she has been entirely wrong, that she has been misreading the signs of his identity and motives. But it is equally significant that Malloy remains linked to Rodriguez in the patterns of psychic logic that infuse the narrative, suggesting Rodriguez and Pauline to be more extreme doubles of Frannie and Malloy. Generally, the character structure of the narrative follows symbolic psychic logic, as Frannie and Malloy pair off against Pauline and Rodriguez, the latter manifesting as more extreme doubles. In all of the scenes in which they appear together, Malloy and Rodriguez follow similar patterns of behavior and language. In the police car, when they pick up Frannie together, they overlap and complete each other's sentences, turn their heads at the same time, and wear similar expressions—effects reinforced by the scene's editing and close framing. Their appearances, height, and gestures while smoking are similar enough that either one, face fully shadowed, could have been the stranger receiving fellatio. And both bear the three of spades tattoos as members of their own "club." At a key moment, when Malloy turns away from intimacy with Frannie, he says of the unidentified serial killer, "I can't get that sick fuck out of my head."

Similarly, we first see Pauline directly linked to Frannie's half-awake reverie about her mother, and she is also explicitly associated with the unconscious. "You live out of your unconscious," Frannie admiringly says to her. Acting out the sexual behavior that Frannie imagines, Pauline is, in effect, the slasher victim that Frannie avoids becoming. When Frannie, out of her mind with grief, alcohol, and passion, dresses in Pauline's provocative red dress and shoes before handcuffing Malloy, she is asserting sexual power, but also taking on the attributes that will make her vulnerable to Rodriguez.

At the killing ground of the lighthouse, Frannie is fully trapped, the apparently helpless and paralyzed victim of Rodriguez's murderously maudlin romantic fantasies. Malloy's gun that she has carried unaware in his jacket becomes the surprising means of her self-rescue, ending the scene with a dramatic overhead shot of Frannie and Rodriguez's consummated "marriage"—with him lying on her in a bloody enactment of the missionary position. Her dazed return to Malloy, to her apartment where he remains handcuffed on his back in a pool of water (from the broken radiator pipes), is the dialogic counterpart to the scene with Rodriguez. She joins Malloy, cuddling spoon fashion, suggesting vulnerability, reconciliation, exhaustion, and surrender. The door swings shut (a strong motif in the film), ending the narrative in darkness.

Although the plot resolves, the narrative's cumulative import remains ambivalent and complex. Malloy is clearly innocent, but he still bears the tattoo and remains handcuffed. Imaginatively, *In the Cut* almost has a double-ending like that of *The Piano,* where Ada's will has "chosen life" only to have the

film close with a murky image of the submerged piano and ghost-like shroud. Here the doubleness comes from Malloy's link to Rodriguez and from the way the serial killer narrative has been submerged in the art-cinema exploration of Frannie's psyche. It becomes clear that Rodriguez has been stalking Frannie throughout; her survival is a surprise, like Ada's, and her return to Malloy, which is cathartic, nevertheless carries the afterimage of traumas and grimmer outcomes.

To say that Campion has incorporated the sensational genre material into her psychic narrative, appropriating some of its associations for other purposes, is one way to describe the film's overall structure. A more precise account would suggest that *In the Cut* deploys a range of different discourses: the serial killer story and setting; the depiction of character in the romance between Frannie and Malloy; a dense flow of visual and aural imagery that evokes Frannie's stream of consciousness; and a flow of signifiers that self-consciously, often ironically, delineates themes. The ice-skating sequences, for example, nominally represent Frannie's psyche, but their style gives them an additional aspect of sardonic commentary in a completely different register from the emotionally charged scenes around them.

This wide range of cinematic registers is mirrored and amplified throughout the film by the pervasive appearance of verbal language across an equivalent range of discourse registers. For all its density of visual imagery, *In the Cut* is also an extraordinarily verbal film—not in terms of dialogue, but in the actual appearance of words as objects and a constant attention to the way language works as a system of signifiers in cultural and psychic processes. In two important scenes, the framing centers a neon sign that advertises "Psychic Reader" in the window next to Frannie's apartment door. The sign suggestively identifies a receptive interpretive stance and a typically feminine discourse that operates on the margins of the acceptable, expressing and responding to hopes, fears, and desires, usually for romance. Similarly, the iconic songs of love and romance that the narration strongly foregrounds comment ironically and sadly on the power of language to construct subjectivity, including "Que Sera, Sera," "It Was Just My Imagination," "I Think I Love You," and "The Look of Love."

Frannie, as the central consciousness in the film, is also the "collector" of language. Words as objects decorate her apartment: magnetic poetry on her apartment door, scraps of poetry on her refrigerator, and photocopied or handwritten lines of poetry on the

Psychic reader

walls of her apartment. After Malloy's description of Angela Sands' murder, Frannie mouths the word "disarticulated," apparently fascinated with the sound and strangeness of the word. She fondles Malloy's business card, fetishistically stroking the card and brushing it against her cheek.

Slang, which Frannie is collecting for a book, is, as she notes in her opening scene with Pauline, "always about sex and violence," a strongly self-referential comment in this sexual and violent narrative. Frannie provides some specific examples: "broccoli" means "pubic hair"; "Virginia" means "vagina," as in "He penetrated her virginia with a hammer." The "cut" of the title is of course itself slang. The overdetermined repetition of words signifying "vagina" and the visual association with the red cut of the father's skates and Rodriguez's murderous knife cuts build an underlying network of uncomfortable juxtapositions between male-dominated language and violence and women's bodies and sexual desire.

When Frannie meets with Cornelius in the Red Turtle it is nominally to collect slang, but the pretext of studying the surface of language for its coded clues becomes the seething subtext of an attraction that is explicitly sexual and conflicted. Cornelius challenges whether Frannie is using him disrespectfully, and their communion through language gets reflected in their awkward decoding of each other's meaning. Thus, when Cornelius approaches Frannie with the money he owes her from the bar tab and queries her as to her long delayed return from the bathroom, she replies, "I got lost. I couldn't find the bathroom." His response of "Is that all?" evokes anxiety on Frannie's part, as she imagines that Cornelius may have observed her watching the stranger receiving fellatio. In a moment marked by thrilling tension, Frannie replies, "What do you mean, is that all?" to which

Cornelius says, "Is that all I *owe* you?" Clearly, the language operates on several levels, reflecting misunderstanding, sexual innuendo, and an unspecified range of emotion and discomfort.

At the literary end of the discourse spectrum, Frannie's stream of consciousness often fills with fragments of high culture poetry. In the iconic subway scenes, Frannie enters a psychic vortex where the words of the Poetry in Transit program seem to comment upon and locate her actions and intentions at each stage of the narrative: "Midway along the journey of our life/I awoke to find myself in a dark wood" (Dante); "Thinking back/On the course of my passion,/I was like one blind,/Unafraid of the dark" (Yosano). The allusion to Dante's *Inferno,* not present in Moore's novel, suggests something of the weight with which Frannie's inner journey can be taken. But Campion also infuses Frannie's relation to poetry and literature with irony. Malloy and Rodriguez, while intimidating Frannie, tease her (as the English teacher) with ridiculous literate puns as they question her about Angela Sands' murder and show her pictures of Angela's severed head: "Is it an isthmus? . . . Isthmus be my lucky day. . . ." Similarly, when the two detectives interrogate her about her relationship with Cornelius Webb, they taunt, "Webb—is that with two 'B's' or 'Not to B's'?"

When Malloy takes Frannie to a city reservoir to be alone and intimate, she dreamily mouths to herself lines from Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci": "Oh what ails thee pale knight . . ." evoking chivalric romance in a pastoral landscape, only to be shocked when Malloy fires his gun into bags of garbage that are floating in the water. The dark comedy of this moment emphasizes how Frannie uses language to express and experience her feelings, but also to avoid and/or repress the immediate circumstances of her life—a mistake that is part of her misperception of Malloy and the situation that she is in.

Campion is herself, of course, the most literate of filmmakers, in love with high literary art and the power of its language, but also inclined to view it ironically. In this film she further yokes art cinema and feminist sensibility with the "slang" of commercial genre material. The centrality of this bold yoking to the conception of *In the Cut* is strikingly embodied in the exchange between Rodriguez and Frannie in which he announces that they are going "to the lighthouse." Frannie responds, "I teach that," and Rodriguez replies, "I go fishing there." ("Fishing" here, of course, is slang for sex.) The exchange creates a

At the end: paired "consummations"

strange and discordant juxtaposition: Woolf's lighthouse as a symbol of ineffable epiphany, the epitome of a refined modernist, feminist sensibility; Frannie's longing and intellectual detachment (imaged in the phallic red lighthouse she draws on the board of her classroom); and Rodriguez's horrible perversion of male courtship in which the lighthouse becomes a trophy room of body parts.

Taking this imaginative moment as a condensation of the film's affect and strategy, a juxtaposition both fully disturbing and intellectually baroque, it is understandable that *In the Cut* did not immediately find an appreciative audience. But such unexpected juxtapositions and shifts in discourse register breaking through the narrative surface have been a consistent feature of Jane Campion's films. *Holy Smoke!* uses a sudden and wildly colored animated sequence to suggest both the power and deluded quality of Ruth's revelation with her guru in India. The whole narrative juxtaposes the social satire of Ruth's family with the claustrophobically intense, even surreal, psychodrama between Ruth and P.J. Waters. *Portrait of a Lady,* which reproduces beautifully the feel of James's language and subtlety, superficially has the look of a high-budget Masterpiece Theatre drama, but unexpectedly opens to black-and-white scenes of modern young women speaking directly to the camera

of their romantic dreams. At the key moment of Isabel's determination to marry Gilbert Osmond, Campion uses a surprisingly comic black-and-white travelogue sequence in the style of silent films, culminating with animated talking beans that represent Isabel's submission to Osmond. Even *The Piano,* routinely cited as Campion's masterpiece, has its share of disturbing juxtapositions, and attracted many early complaints about such things as the anachronistic music, the incomprehensibility of Ada's character, and the comic use of the Maoris. In a move that is similar to the way she uses *To the Lighthouse* in *In the Cut,* Campion references Bluebeard's discovery of his wife's unlocking the secret trophy room by creating an odd verbal/visual pun as the tattling Flora carries Ada's incriminating (piano) key to Stewart.

The effects and affects of Campion's unusual juxtapositions are not easy to describe. One might see them as fostering a kind of Brechtian alienation, since they introduce explicit thematic and intellectual ironies into what are often intensely visual and emotionally powerful narratives. They seem, however, much more the product of an imaginative instinct or narrative predisposition on Campion's part than an intellectual program. In her DVD commentary to *In the Cut,* she says about the skating scenes that she couldn't "help myself putting them in," and goes on to say that she won't again put in "otherworldly scenes," essentially because she doesn't want her future work to be shaped by expectations as to style. We would suggest that the power of Campion's unexpected juxtapositions has most to do with creating multivalent meanings and emotional overtones. Campion's tales of female desire and will power dangerously entangled with male power are both radical and idiosyncratic, avoiding conventional feminist ideology as well as the well-worn ruts of mainstream cinema. To that end, narrative intensity, surprise, and viewer discomfort are all necessary. By crossing and bringing into collision the boundaries of the discourse registers and signifying systems that we all depend upon to stabilize our engagement with imaginative art, her films open space for layers of emotions and awareness that lie in the margins of language and closer to the unconscious forces that govern the subjectivity of women and men. They ask from viewers a kind of alert receptivity.

In the Cut pursues this strategy more boldly than any of Campion's films to date. Its constant attention to language use and the multiple coding of signifiers, as well as the emphasis in the plot on how Frannie interprets the signs around her, strongly foregrounds its own making of meaning. During one class session in which Frannie is leading discussion on *To the Lighthouse,* a student complains that nothing happens in the book. He protests, "Only one old lady dies." Frannie counters, "How may old ladies have to die?" The painful metacommentary this creates in a film where women are being brutally murdered by a serial killer is striking. Ironically, the classroom exchange reflects the many critical complaints and misconceptions about *In the Cut* itself. Implicit in the student's question and Frannie's response is the conflict between a reader's comfortable expectations and a text that requires both a different kind of reading and a much wider sensitivity. Like all of Campion's films, *In the Cut* creates its own language and way of making meaning. The challenge it brings into sharp focus is how to be the kind of receptive "psychic reader" that her innovative and radical vision has called for from the beginning.

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Note

1. Our reading of *In the Cut* has been informed by an evening's discussion with Laurie Parker, the producer of *In the Cut,* and Nick D'Amici, who played the role of Rodriguez. We would like to thank them for their generosity in spending time with us and with our students.

Abstract Jane Campion's newest film, *In the Cut,* confounded critics, as it leaves her familiar territory of Anglo Australia and a high literary mode for New York City and the pop culture associations of a slasher/thriller. Transcending genre, the screenplay and cinematography unconventionally render a psychic landscape of female desire and romantic longing surviving in a male urban wasteland.

Hero

Director: Zhang Yimou. Producers: Zhang and Bill Kong. Writers: Zhang, Li Feng, and Wang Bin. Cinematographer: Christopher Doyle. Music: Tan Dun. Miramax Films.

When Zhang Yimou's *Hero* was first released in China in 2002, even though the dazzling beauty of its martial-arts scenes did create a sensation, many viewers were angered by what they believed to be the film's political stand—a justification of despotism in the history of China. Nonetheless, after *Hero* was released in the United States in August, 2004, millions of its viewers were simply enchanted by this spectacular epic and no one (except some from the Chinese community here) seems to have felt offended by it. However *Hero* has been viewed by its diverse audiences, when the excitement and the anger alike have subsided, a cool mind may venture to search the film for more meaning, as the director of *Judou, Raise the Red Lantern* and *Not One Less* has never proven superficial.

At first sight, *Hero* does appear to differ considerably from Zhang's previous works. From *Red Sorghum* (1988) to *Not One Less* (1999), his prior films are all set in twentieth-century China, and their narratives almost always center on characters of humble social status and their pitiable plight. The story of *Hero* is not only set in an entirely different period (toward the end of the third century B.C., when China was unified by her first emperor), but its protagonists, the King of Qin who succeeds in unifying China and the warriors who are involved in an attempt to assassinate him, are all prominent figures rather than everyday people. The film's title, *Hero,* declares straightforwardly that this is a story about someone exceptional. But who is the hero, and what meaning does that term really suggest?

The film begins with a warrior, Nameless (Wuming), summoned to meet the King of Qin to receive a reward for, allegedly, having eliminated three warriors—Sky (Changkong), Flying Snow (Feixue), and Broken Sword (Canjian)—who are all suspected of trying to assassinate the king. The narrative unfolds in an episodic structure as the film cuts between the king's meeting with Nameless at the court and flashbacks based on their conversation. It eventually turns out that Nameless has fabricated the story of killing the three warriors so that he can come to claim the reward at the royal court, thus having a chance to slay the king on the spot. (Sky and Flying Snow are actually his co-conspirators.) Unfortunately, the astute king sees through his fraud. Nameless, rather than feeling frustrated, is impressed by the king's cleverness. He confesses to the king what is beyond the latter's imagination: surprisingly, one of the three warriors, Broken Sword, has tried to stop Nameless from assassinating the king, on the grounds that he is the only man capable of unifying China and bringing peace to the people. The king is deeply touched and, after contemplating an example of Broken Sword's calligraphy—an enormous character for "sword"—presented to him by Nameless, he has a revelation: "The ultimate goal of swordsmanship is to have no sword in either one's hand or heart and to be at peace with the entire world. That means not to kill; that is peace!" Nameless is overwhelmed by the king's enlightenment and determined to spare this great king, who will establish order and peace in the universe. But in order to keep his promise to his friends, Nameless has to *appear* to assassinate the king. We see him lunging toward the king, only to pretend to stab him. Then, dropping the sword on the floor, he says, "Your Majesty, please remember the ultimate goal, for the sake of those who sacrifice their lives for it!" As Nameless steps out of the court, we hear the guards roaring (presumably in the king's imagination): "Enforce the law made by Your Majesty! Execute him!," warning him not to hesitate in performing his duty as the ruler. After a moment of wavering, the king makes up his mind and Nameless is executed. Upon hearing of this, Flying Snow becomes furious with Broken Sword, as she is convinced that the failure of the mission is due solely to his interference. She challenges him to a duel. In order to show that he is as faithful to her as ever, he does not fend off her sword, and is killed. In total despair, Flying Snow stabs herself with the same sword. Such is the tragic ending of *Hero*. The

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Maggie Cheung as Flying Snow

film's final shot presents the Great Wall standing among ranges of mountains with a subtitle explaining, "In 221 B.C., the King of Qin unified China and became the first emperor in Chinese history. After the warfare came to an end, he ordered the Great Wall built to protect his subjects from being harassed by Northern tribes."

Viewers may leave with the impression that the film's message is simply that abandoning the attempt to kill the King of Qin was the right thing to do, for the sake of bringing an end to the chaos in China; and that, for his feat of unifying China, the first emperor deserves to be regarded as a hero. Moreover, the four warriors not only demonstrate amazing skill in martial arts, but also prove admirable for their moral integrity, and therefore should be considered heroes as well. Nevertheless, according to historical records, the first emperor of China was unequivocally a tyrant. As China's society has been increasingly liberalized over the past two decades or so, fewer and fewer people there still have a favorable attitude toward tyranny. It was not without reason that *Hero* was harshly criticized by many. Despite his success in unifying China, should the first emperor not still be held accountable for his brutality? Or, should the tyranny he represents be thus justified?

Zhang's works are controversial in China, but, before *Hero,* he had never been criticized as sympathetic to autocracy. On the contrary, his previous films actually share a consistent central theme: a critical examination of the history and the cultural tradition of China,[1] which has seemed to some as an offensive denigration of their own country. So what is Zhang up to this time?

First of all, except for the King of Qin, no other protagonist in the film is a real figure in historical records, and the story actually differs greatly from what is documented. We may thus view the king as an allegorical symbol of monarchy rather than as the actual historical tyrant. Secondly, although the king and the warriors, each in his or her own way, all show heroic traits, none can be regarded as a real hero in the full sense of the word, if hero means an ideal model of courage, wisdom, and nobility.

Let us first look at the warriors. As Broken Sword points out, the motive for Nameless, Sky, and Flying Snow's attempt to assassinate the king is nothing more than their hatred for Qin as the enemy of Zhao, their own kingdom. What should be the next step after the king is deposed? They do not seem to have any idea. For Flying Snow, her hatred for Qin is simply an obsession, which finally leads to the destruction of

Jet Li as Nameless

Flying Snow and the king's soldiers

Broken Sword's life as well as her own, and thus she is truly like flying snow, meaninglessly fading away. Nameless seems to have a more cultivated pursuit in life. At one point, he says, "Martial arts and music . . . both seek a supreme realm of transcendence." However, his search for the supreme realm does not seem to involve any specific political theory. If his mission to assassinate the king is his political goal, then such a goal without a political theory is doomed to failure, just as his mission results in his death. Nameless, therefore, does not seem to need a name, as his ambition has been reduced to naught.

Of the four warriors, Sky is the only one who survives the tragedy, but the subtitle at the end tells us: "In honor of his three friends, Sky gave up his swordsmanship for good." Although his life continues, he is unable to see a future, seemingly suggesting that it will be a lasting vacuum (as his name, Changkong, also means in Chinese) that cannot be filled. Compared to the other warriors, Broken Sword does seem to have a more enriched intellectual life. He not only understands that swordsmanship and calligraphy share the same supreme realm ("return to innocence"), but also recognizes that, in the interest of all people under heaven, the attempt to assassinate the King of Qin should be abandoned. Thus Broken Sword can be viewed as the only warrior with some political sophistication. Nevertheless, neither Broken Sword's political thoughts nor his supreme innocence explain why Nameless is to be executed even after his conversion; nor can they explain why the king, after he has recognized that the ultimate goal of swordsmanship is "not to kill," still decides to execute Nameless. Broken Sword's ideas, evidently, are incomplete, which perhaps explains his name. As for the king, for all his incomparable intelligence and might, he turns out to be unable to live up to his stated principle of "peace." His moment of hesitation discloses a conflict in his heart: to execute Nameless is not really what he desires to do, but "to be at peace with the entire world" would not ensure him the maintenance of his power or the realization of his ambition to establish an empire. He fails to see a better choice: to be ruthless is the only way—what an awkward dilemma for this powerful king!

The limitations of these "heroes" are offered not only through these clues provided by the plot, they are also represented symbolically by certain visual devices. Each episode of the film is toned predominantly with one special color. This use of color could suggest that it is often difficult to see what is true or false. However, these exaggerated colors may also forcefully expand our perception. In the episode in which Nameless allegedly tries to annihilate Broken Sword and Flying Snow, a filter is often used to give the entire screen a red wash, and nearly all the characters are dressed in red. With all the martial-arts action, the red serves to highlight the warriors' valiant fighting spirits, and, in turn, the bloodiness of the violence. However, red is not associated with strong intellect, which may allude to what is lacking in those warriors.

In the episode in which Broken Sword and Flying Snow practice swordsmanship and calligraphy together, and later storm the palace in order to kill the king, they are both dressed in green, commensurate with their youth. Yet their youthful vigor does not yield wisdom, as green does not really suggest profundity. In another episode, when Nameless is trying to persuade Broken Sword and Flying Snow to participate in his plan to assassinate the king, the three of them, as well as Moon (Ruyue), Broken Sword's servant girl, are all dressed in white. And at this point, as Broken Sword has discovered his realm of transcendence, his white garb aptly echoes his inner innocence. In another sense, however, it is not always easy to draw a clear line between innocence and ignorance; thus the white color of his garb may also suggest his lack of knowledge about politics and society. Furthermore, according to traditional Chinese custom, white is a color of mourning, and thus his death seems foreshadowed. This final point can also explain why the other three are dressed in white as well. Nameless and Flying Snow both later die for their naïve idealism; Moon is left in the world only to mourn over the deceased, but her life henceforth does not seem to mean anything other than that, thus leaving her future a blank white page, not unlike the future for Sky—a lasting vacuum.

In the entire film, the king is the only character presented in a bluish tone. As a powerful leader, his political wisdom may well be reflected by the blue, which often symbolizes profundity. But his blue garb and the bluish tone used for his court are both quite dark, which hints at a dark side of this same wisdom. In addition, in front of his throne, we always see a cluster of orange candle-flames and, in many shots, the huge red character for "sword" hangs behind his throne, indicating that his wisdom is troubled by conflicts.

A compositional device provides similar telling hints. In nearly all the fight scenes, although the warriors' martial-arts performances are a marvelous sight to behold, their figures are almost always confined within a web-like configuration, formed by columns and eaves in a courtyard, or by branches and foliage in a forest. No matter how valiant and phenomenal they

The compositional magnificence of Hero

may look, they never seem able to move beyond their limitations in the world. And although the king finally succeeds in conquering the other six kingdoms and becoming the supreme authority of the Qin Empire, while sitting on his throne he is always seen framed within a small space, caught between the screen behind him and the cluster of lighted candles in front. An irony is thus suggested: if he stands for an emperor's supreme power and nothing is above this power, then he seems to be restricted by nothing but the supreme power for which he stands—the dilemma for any absolute ruler.

Moreover, in the extreme long shot presenting the king for his last appearance in the film, he is located so far away—sitting on the same throne, framed within the same small space as before—that this supreme ruler is oddly dwarfed. With his tiny figure far in the background, we cannot help feeling surprised: How could this supreme ruler appear so insignificant?

Now it becomes clear what *Hero* is really about: the lack of any real hero. With this in mind, the allegory of *Hero* leads us to a new point of view on history: while people of no consequence are often trapped in a miserable predicament (as Zhang's previous films strongly suggest), people of consequence are also frequently trapped, although in a different type of predicament. The dilemma we often encounter in history, therefore, may be viewed as the combination of these two types of predicament. As long as society remains basically unenlightened, neither those in power nor those under that power are able to save the society from these dire straits. Many tyrannies in history, therefore, seem to result from this type of dilemma, rather than arising as morally justifiable solutions—a typical misfortune for a pre-democratic society.

The final step of our search must examine the film's last shot. At the conclusion of *Hero,* the upper half of the screen shows the sky with a rising sun, while the lower half reveals the Great Wall undulating among innumerable mountain peaks. The subtitle tells us that the king has accomplished the unification of China. The rising sun manifestly announces the beginning of a new era—the founding of the Chinese empire, a triumph over the chaos of the past. But the camera immediately moves away from the sun; the promising moment does not last long. With this camera movement, the image of the Great Wall symbolically projects China's history on the screen. For most

of the dynasties, the beginning period of prosperity is unsustained, just as the rising sun is only in view momentarily, tantalizing our vain hopes. What is more, the Great Wall and the mountains are backlit, cast in shadow; the glory of the unified empire is accompanied by a feeling of darkness. In carefully reviewing the history of China since her unification by the first emperor, we must recognize that such incongruity indeed marks almost its entire history.

Now it is also clear why *Hero* is set in the period when the Chinese empire first came into being, over 2000 years ago. While Zhang's previous works focus on examining the history of China over the past century or so, *Hero* looks back over two millennia, greatly widening our vision of history. The frustration China has experienced turns out not to be limited to the past century, the confusion in the search for modern China, but has been a theme almost since its inception. For ancient and medieval China, the frustration lies in the failure to find a sage monarch—a real hero. This is the revelation of *Hero*.

This treasury of meaning underlying the visual magnificence of *Hero* should be recognized as the overall aesthetic design for this masterpiece. Most significantly, *Hero* extends the track of history back to a remote period, inspiring us to take a profoundly macrocosmic view, rather than a limited vision, of history. Along the track of history reflected through Zhang Yimou's camera, a new sign appears, heralding wider vision, broader thinking, and deeper understanding.

It is also time to acquit *Hero* of its alleged political betrayal. Hopefully, the film's critics may now be convinced that the anger they have cherished is no longer necessary. Ironically, their misunderstandings seem to have been caused by none other than a very positive value of *Hero*: *ambiguity*. Ambiguity makes the meaning of the film difficult to perceive, but should be considered an important criterion of high-quality art.

Based on the same criterion, *The Emperor's Shadow* (Zhou Xiaowen) and *The Emperor and the Assassin* (Chen Kaige), both of which exploit the same subject (China's first emperor), can hardly be rated as highly as *Hero.* Although the messages of both films are strong (and they happen to be almost identical)—that desirable or not, political success and ruthlessness go hand in hand—the messages are conveyed in obvious ways. For both films, neither the narratives of the stories nor the visual representations on the screen seem to suggest much ambiguity. In this sense, neither film shows much potential for multivalent meaning, and it is difficult to find in them the same kind of depth in historical viewpoint as that in *Hero*.

Martial-arts films are generally known for their entertainment value: exciting fight scenes, romanticized violence, nicely choreographed martial-arts movements, idealized courage and integrity, and happy endings. Appealing as these films may be, intellectual sophistication is usually not their concern. Prior to *Hero*, there had been only a limited number of films in this genre that ever demonstrated some intellectual quality. Nonetheless, even for those more sophisticated ones, such as *A Touch of Zen* (King Hu, 1969) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000), the meanings that can be found, in either the stories or the cinematic techniques, are hardly as profound as those of *Hero*. With its powerful intellectual energy and its highly sophisticated artistic devices, *Hero* gloriously breaks into new territory for this genre, and moves its frontier greatly beyond its old border. Indeed, *Hero* may well claim a unique title for itself: "Hero."

Jia-xuan Zhang was born in Beijing, China and received a master's degree in cinema studies at New York University in 1985. Since then he has been working in New York City as a freelance film critic, translator, photographer, and Chinese calligrapher. He also teaches Chinese cinema at CUNY and New School University.

Notes

1. Over the past century or so, China has been persistently struggling toward an ambitious goal to modernize her ancient society, and no doubt, in many ways, significant progress has been made. Yet, despite its remarkable achievements, China's society has always been haunted by a demonic shadow of history; the age-old tradition of China, like an omnipresent specter, never fails to reemerge in new forms after each major attempt to reform or revolutionize the society; the exalted goal of a bright future is yet to be reached after so many sacrifices have been made for it. This puzzling predicament is, in fact, the central theme of China's modern history, and it is also the consistent theme of Zhang's films prior to *Hero*. However, this theme in those films is mostly not explicitly manifested in the narratives of the stories but, rather, implicitly represented through highly symbolic cinematic signs.

Abstract: Is *Hero* just another martial-arts film? Who is the hero in *Hero*? Does the film suggest a justification for the despotism in Chinese history, as many Chinese critics have charged? Is there any connection between *Hero* and Zhang Yimou's previous works? This review focuses on these challenging questions as it explores the intricacies of *Hero*.

ANNUAL FILM BOOK SURVEY

PART I

Ball of Fire

The Tempestuous Life and Comic Art of Lucille Ball

By Stefan Kanfer. New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. $25.95.

His timing is right. That is the first of a number of appreciative things that can be said of Stefan Kanfer's biography of Lucille Ball. For someone who is at home among comedians—Kanfer is also the author of two books on Groucho Marx and one on the Borscht Belt—timing is certainly a nice thing to have, a vivid reminder of what makes the artists you have chosen special in the first place.

Until the arrival of the Kanfer biography, any time had been considered the right time to spill ink on the subject of Lucille Ball. Indeed, as Kanfer observes in the first pages of his study, Lucy-mania has been in full swing since the October 1951 premiere of the first—and most celebrated—of Ball's five television series, *I Love Lucy*. The fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of Ball's achievements became a kind of international mardi gras, resulting in a glut of publications as well as screenings of *I Love Lucy* that somehow made the already ubiquitous series, redundantly, more so.

As pleasure in Ball begins its steady march toward the centenary mark, it is fitting that we put away childish things—badly reproduced photo calendars of the series, hastily assembled books of quotations from the show—and endeavor to seriously assess what Ball's comic legacy has meant on its own terms, in relation to comedienne comedy and the role of femininity, and in connection with the fellas (Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, Lewis, and Skelton) who taught her so much about, in Kanfer's words, "comic art."

Despite committing these welcome words to his title, Kanfer ranges over only the "tempestuous life" of Ball. Yet more trickery with titles mars the final chapter, "A Marx Sister," when Kanfer spins the dial that might have unlocked the vault of Ball's comic art; however, we never hear the final click of the tumblers. Although he weaves a daisy chain of provocative observations by others about Ball's comedy, Kanfer never undertakes any systematic analysis of his own, except in the last two pages. There, he hastily proffers the theory that Ball's comedy was colorful because colorless: to wit, arguing that color and memorable comedy don't mix.

Given that all of Kanfer's energy went to create a biography of Ball rather than a study of her comedy, the question obviously turns on how successful he is at the former. Certainly, of the handful of biographies of Ball—the last of which was written by Kathleen Brady in 1994—Kanfer has authored the most respectable, objective, and serious of them all. Brady, for instance, proclaims, "When I was a child in the 1950s, I wanted to be Lucy Ricardo. I wanted to stun my family with extraordinary pranks and to experience the kind of improbable adventures that were everyday events for Lucy. When I was an adolescent, I wanted to be Lucille Ball. Like her, I wanted to be the master of extraordinary talents, to have total control of my life, to be able to rectify all my mistakes while having everyone honor and love me" (xi). In negotiating Ball's "tempestuous life," Kanfer avoids obvious potholes such as overidentification with his subject; nonetheless, he rarely hazards a turn that leads to significant new information.

The absence of notable new material notwithstanding, Kanfer does well to ask framing questions which imply a new rigor and the passing of the era when books were published on Ball simply because we love Lucy. For example, his preface begins with the worthwhile questions, "Why Lucy? Why Now?" (ix). And he closes the preface with a brilliant query that might have presaged an equally brilliant study, were it not the case that he ultimately dodges the puzzle of why "as a sixty-foot image on the screen," Ball was "only a journeywoman performer" when "as a sixteen-inch TV image, she turned into a superstar" (x).

Film Quarterly, Vol. 58, Issue 4, pages 53-75. ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630.
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University of California Press Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

Lurking at the heart of that wise question should be a scholarly thesis and the careful assemblage of the sorts of proof that academics bake into a pie. In pursuit of such a goal, one must expect to be huffing and puffing over the rolling pin for quite some time. Without question, *Ball of Fire* represents considerable effort: its ample bibliography, for instance, takes the time to annotate other studies of Ball's career. Nonetheless, in the end, elements of Kanfer's pie taste suspiciously ready-made. The scholarship of the bibliography is nowhere in evidence in the book's chapters: that is, there is no footnoting and thus no way for scholars of Ball to use this volume with full confidence. Kathleen Brady's *Lucille: The Life of Lucille Ball*—whatever its other failings—is footnoted, so it seems a step backward for Kanfer's book to lack these credentials. *Ball of Fire,* ultimately, is neither (academic) fish nor (popular) fowl and suffers for this shape-shifting.

One example of the limitations imposed by electing a "lite" version of scholarship is that Kanfer's account of Ball's Communist association—a topic for which he is supremely suited as the author of *Journal of the Plague Years* —seems anemic. Although Ball's FBI files are easily downloadable on the internet, Kanfer's bibliography does not list either Ball's or Arnaz's FBI files. Moreover, the tone of Kanfer's "red" chapter is consistent with the architecture of the remainder of the book: that is, Kanfer hews to telling his tale chronologically. When he finds himself in the year 1953, he dutifully but briefly narrates Ball's Communist crisis and then moves onward, as if unaware that he has left an important stone only partially turned. The incident, however, reveals volumes about Ball's naïveté and about Arnaz's role as the talking head who often saved the day.

Although *Ball of Fire* never generates the heat that it might, it is critically important for daring to show some scholarly leg. Ball has been shockingly neglected by the scholarly world—with the first critical essay about her not published until 35 years after she first appeared as Lucy Ricardo. To produce a work that, however imperfectly, honors both the spirit of serious scholars and serious worshipers of Ball is no small feat. To purists on either side, this form of cross-breeding may seem as misguided as that which governed bringing together the first donkey and horse. The result was a stubborn creature who cannot breed. In the present case, this mulish book—tentatively scholarly and yet sold widely in a trade market —may in fact produce others like it and continue ratcheting up the quality of the public discussions about Lucille Ball's legacy. For those of us who believe that Ball's "comic art" deserves as many column inches as possible, the still-passionate flow of words—about "a life begun nearly a century ago, and a career that ended more than two decades ago" (321)—makes us as tipsy with joy as if we were the ones hitting the Vitameatavegamin bottle.

Susan M. Carini is the executive director of the Emory University Publications Office and a graduate of Emory's Film Studies program. Her essay on Lucille Ball's publicity crises in the 1950s won first prize in the 2001 SCMS Student Essay Award.

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Black Directors in Hollywood

By Melvin Burke Donalson. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003. $65 cloth; $24.95 paper.

Black cinema, as a commercial enterprise addressing a popular audience (ranging from segregated to crossover), has had its waves and prolonged gaps, its ups and downs. Developing out of the "race films" of the teens through the '50s, then the Blaxploitation boom of the '70s, and now the "new black film wave" of the mid-'80s to the present, black cinema production has reached a plateau of 15 to 20 features a year. This contemporary wave or boom has been accompanied by a number of excellent academic, and popular, books on the subject that have contributed to an increasingly sophisticated critical and theoretical discourse dedicated to black cinema. Among these varied books, the encyclopedic survey—listing and commenting on films, filmmakers, actors, plot summaries—has long been a basic tool for critics and scholars. Most recently, and making some interesting interventions in the formula, Melvin Donalson's *Black Directors in Hollywood* stands out of the pack of these studies predicated on the cataloging instinct.

Donalson's book is big and comprehensive, surveying in varied combinations the bios, films with plot summaries, production and economic data, and in some instances the acting roles, of all commercial black directors from the 1960s to 1999 with a proverbial foot (no matter how marginally) in Hollywood's industrial door. But also, *Black Directors in Hollywood* takes a unique angle on its materials, and in a useful way supercedes other encyclopedic studies, cinematic catalogs, and annotated filmographies. By looking at black directors in an industrial context, the author explores persons, personae, and business relations from a "behind the camera" angle rather than in front of it, as do most studies of this type. Generally underexplored, the executive office, the business lunch, as well as direction on location and in the editing room, are prime territory for understanding and building a viable and representative black commercial cinema practice. For ultimately, it is comprehending the "business model" (be it "guerilla financing," "Sundancing," or crossover success) of one's moment in black cinema—as much as political or cultural manifestoes, or a critical mass of black, insurgent creativity —that in various combinations makes for a "black film wave." Equally as important, when it comes to "discourse building" (thinking and writing about black American filmmaking in some theoretical or critical form), *Black Directors in Hollywood* serves as a great research instrument and first step in this endeavor.

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Black Directors' structure follows a developmental trajectory that also highlights important genres, styles, and issues. This contributes to the book's discussion as clear, well-organized, accessible at any point, as well as loosely historical. Directors are gathered and presented according to their contribution to their historical moment in the context of a genre or wave. Accordingly, one finds chapters like "The Pathmakers," discussing the pioneering efforts of Gordon Parks and Melvin Van Peebles; "The Visionary Actors," on Ossie Davis and Sidney Poitier; "Black Sensibilities and Mainstream Images," on Berry Gordy Jr., Stan Lathan, and Jamaa Fanaka. Other chapters consider an important political or production issue, or cultural style, such as the persistent underrepresentation of black women in the industry addressed in "And Still They Rise: Black Women Directors," or a chapter on the influence of Hip-Hop on the genres of comedy and romance.

The book is punctuated with a couple of chapters devoted to individual prolific directors, such as "Spike Lee: The Independent Auteur," in contrast to the thin chapter "Michael Schultz: The Crossover King." This juxtaposition subtly alludes to issues in the muddled "independence vs. mainstream" debate still vaguely haunting black cinema discourse. When applied to any given feature-film director, this binary argument, at best, has to come up a mixed bag. While Schultz has been prominently "mainstream" in his career, with Donalson noting that between 1964 and 1985 he was Hollywood's "major black director of feature films" (black, white, and/or crossover), his work has not been particularly associated with a specific genre, boom, or movement, and perhaps therein lies his success as a mainstream director. However, even with prominent black crossover successes, like *Cooley High* and *Car Wash* of the 1970s, or *Krush Groove* (1985) and *Livin' Large* (1991), many of Schultz's other films, as Donalson points out, have been forgettable, lost in an apolitical crossover haze, most notably *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1978). While being solidly in the mainstream, his impact has been more that of an underexposed "independent." In Donalson's words, in this most recent black movie boom this has moved Schultz from the vanguard, "to the back of the auditorium."

Conversely, the chapter proclaiming Spike Lee an "independent auteur," presents the most fully developed interrogation of all the directors in the book. Yet, in contradiction to this "independent" tag, Lee stands as one of the most prolific and high profile black directors in the mainstream industry. Accordingly, Donalson does a meticulous job of covering the films, techniques, aesthetics, and trajectory of Lee's work, thoroughly examining his critical and/or box office successes, including *She's Gotta Have It, Malcolm X, Do the Right Thing,* and *Four Little Girls*. But to the credit and overall strength of his project, Donalson's interrogation is not uncritically or blindly celebratory of any given director. He observes that among Lee's feature successes, he has had his critical controversies, studio struggles, and box-office duds. Donalson, for example, astutely notes that *Jungle Fever* (1991) could have been remarkable in advancing an enlightened understanding of interracial romance, but instead the film echoes the separatist and hopelessly out-of-date prohibitions of Hollywood's bigoted past. Donalson concludes his "Spike" chapter with insight into Lee's most significant, if least appreciated, contribution to black cinema: his long coattails in the industry. First addressed is the remarkable number of actors whose careers he has launched or advanced in his films, including, among the many, Denzel Washington, Laurence Fishburne, Giancarlo Esposito, Samuel L. Jackson, John Turturro, Roger Guenveur Smith, Rosie Perez, Halle Berry, Annabella Sciorra, and Alfie Woodard. Lee's other legacy concerns the number of young, emergent directors he has brought into the business through his production company: Kasi Lemmons, Darnell Martin, and Rusty Cundieff among them.

In other nuanced ways, *Black Directors*' discussion proves quite insightful, entertaining, and useful, as when Donalson quotes the fiercely independent and creative Wendell B. Harris, whose *Chameleon Street* won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance in 1990. This, however, did not get Harris onto Hollywood's production lot. Harris cautions "all those winners who pass through the pristine gates of Sundance—especially female filmmakers and filmmakers of color—not to be lulled into thinking that the rarefied hothouse atmosphere of Sundance extends into the whorehouse atmosphere of Hollywood." In another insightful passage, introducing the chapter on the work of nine black women directors (Euzhan Palcy, Julie Dash, Leslie Harris, Darnell Martin, and Kasi Lemmons among them), Donalson cogently explores the near complete exclusion of black women from the industry, as well as the reasons for their persistent, if occasional, successes. Likewise, Donalson's opening to "Redefining Crossover Films" is valuable in considering one of the main directions that black cinema seems to be headed.

If there are limitations or criticisms of *Black Directors,* they would be that in many instances the discussion moves too easily onto turf already explored, and that the book does not deliver vital statistical information on the directors and their productions in a consistently organized or accessible manner. Donalson relies too heavily on descriptive plot summary to fill in his coverage of his subjects and their films. Conversely, salient information about a given director's films—production costs, box-office profits, publicity budgets, quotes from trade magazines—pops up almost randomly. *Black Directors* would be much more useful if it had a table with each director and the films that he or she has released, rather than leaving the reader to wade through paragraphs of plot summary to sort this information out. However, what *Black Directors* does well is demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the directors, their films, sociopolitical circumstances, and aesthetic issues. And all of this is accompanied by well-placed quotations

and citations, a strong bibliography, and a useful index. In all, Donalson's project makes a valuable, useful contribution to the field, to be enjoyed by scholar and black cinema aficionado alike.

Ed Guerrero is Associate Professor of Cinema Studies and Africana Studies at New York University. His books include *Framing Blackness* (Temple University Press) and *Do the Right Thing* (BFI Modern Classics).

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Le Cinemascope entre art et industrie/Cinemascope between Art and Industry

Edited by Jean-Jacques Meusy. Paris: Association Francaise de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, 2004. 35 Euro.

The 22 essays collected in this volume were presented at an international conference held at the Sorbonne in Paris in December, 2002, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Henri Chretien's invention of the Hypergonar lens and the fiftieth anniversary of its commercial application as CinemaScope by Twentieth Century Fox. All but four of the essays are in French.

As one might expect, pride of place belongs to an essay taking up nearly a quarter of the volume, "L'histoire française du CinemaScope," by Jean-Jacques Meusy and Françoise Le Guet Tully. Their detailed and well-illustrated history of Chretien's development of the Hypergonar lens makes for fascinating reading. Chretien envisioned a lens that would enable filmmakers to adjust the size and shape of an image to match the subject being filmed; in addition to the standard Academy ratio, the anamorphic lens permitted wide views of landscapes as well vertical views of tall buildings. Film histories regularly cite Claude Autant-Lara's use of the lens in filming *Construire un feu* (1928-1930) as an anamorphic landmark. Due to technical limitations, however, the vertically and horizontally squeezed images had to be on separate reels. Amazingly, less than a year later, with *Une Visite aux merveilles de l'Exposition coloniale,* Chretien had devised a projecting lens that could be adjusted during projection, permitting both vertically and laterally squeezed images to be cut together with normal images on the same reel.

Drawing upon material from the Chretien archives and other French sources, Muesy and Le Guet Tully trace the complex negotiations between Chretien and Twentieth Century Fox that eventuated in the licensing of the Hypergonar lens. What would otherwise be a one-sided history is fleshed out by John Belton in "Chretien, Fox, and Franco-American Relations," where documents surviving in the United States reveal Fox's negotiating strategies and the give and take between the parties.

A certain ambivalence about Chretien runs through many of the other essays. While he and his invention are proudly celebrated for being French, his sale to Twentieth Century Fox of the rights to its commercial application is seen as a betrayal of the French film industry in its struggle against American domination. In practical terms, as Olivier Rousseau explains in "Les procèdes anamorphiques français concurrents du CinemaScope (1953-1971)," this meant that the French industry largely resisted using the CinemaScope process, employing, instead, such indigenous clones as DyaliScope and Cinepanoramic-Franscope. Consequently, during the period he discusses, only 12 percent of French anamorphic productions employed CinemaScope lenses.

Christophe Pinel condemns Twentieth Century Fox for aesthetic reasons. By simply limiting CinemaScope to a constant, wide image, Fox, he argues, betrayed the possibilities of the Hypergonar lens as envisioned by Chretien. Instead of a variable image that could be changed to match the subject being filmed, Fox merely settled for a fixed aspect ratio. Consequently, in "Henri Chretien et les inventions successives de l'ecran large," Pinel suggests that run-of-the-mill films shot in the process should be labeled as having been filmed in "CinemaScope," while those films in which filmmakers attempted to limit the width of the image at times for aesthetic reasons be labeled as having been shot in "scope." Among the exceptional directors meriting this label, Pinel lists Cukor, Minnelli, Lang, and Nicholas Ray. Michel Marie also recognizes the widescreen achievements of these directors, but focuses in "Le CinemaScope et la Nouvelle Vague, un parcours esthetique entre quelques films fondateurs," on how it took the directors of the Nouvelle Vague, who as critics had championed CinemaScope in the pages of Cahiers du Cinema, to finally displace the conservatively staid use of the format by French directors in the 1950s.

Most of the volume's dozen essays devoted to widescreen aesthetics reflect a similar distinction between those directors who employed CinemaScope unthinkingly and those who sought, at least in the spirit of Chretien's desire, to use the format as though it permitted a variable aspect ratio. Thus *The Robe* is repeatedly condemned for being crude in its use of the wide screen, while *A Star Is Born* (1954), *Lola Montes,* and *Rebel Without a Cause* are frequently cited for their aesthetically refined application of CinemaScope. Even though he too distinguishes between directors in this way, David Bordwell offers an alternative to everyone else's endorsement of received opinion in his "Schema and Revision: Staging and Composition in CinemaScope," where he takes the trouble to actually examine specific uses of the format and illustrate them with excellently reproduced frame enlargements.

Rather than dismiss what the other writers regard as visually unimaginative CinemaScope films, Bordwell postulates that directors throughout the industry adapted in their use of the process by adjusting pre-existing practices to the wider image: actors stood slightly further apart in two-shots, for example. In examining CinemaScope films in this way, Bordwell demonstrates that actual practice—the rate of cutting, the size and depth of the image—diverged considerably from how filmmakers described their practice in published

and citations, a strong bibliography, and a useful index. In all, Donalson's project makes a valuable, useful contribution to the field, to be enjoyed by scholar and black cinema aficionado alike.

Ed Guerrero is Associate Professor of Cinema Studies and Africana Studies at New York University. His books include *Framing Blackness* (Temple University Press) and *Do the Right Thing* (BFI Modern Classics).

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Le Cinemascope entre art et industrie/Cinemascope between Art and Industry

Edited by Jean-Jacques Meusy. Paris: Association Francaise de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, 2004. 35 Euro.

The 22 essays collected in this volume were presented at an international conference held at the Sorbonne in Paris in December, 2002, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Henri Chretien's invention of the Hypergonar lens and the fiftieth anniversary of its commercial application as CinemaScope by Twentieth Century Fox. All but four of the essays are in French.

As one might expect, pride of place belongs to an essay taking up nearly a quarter of the volume, "L'histoire française du CinemaScope," by Jean-Jacques Meusy and Françoise Le Guet Tully. Their detailed and well-illustrated history of Chretien's development of the Hypergonar lens makes for fascinating reading. Chretien envisioned a lens that would enable filmmakers to adjust the size and shape of an image to match the subject being filmed; in addition to the standard Academy ratio, the anamorphic lens permitted wide views of landscapes as well vertical views of tall buildings. Film histories regularly cite Claude Autant-Lara's use of the lens in filming *Construire un feu* (1928-1930) as an anamorphic landmark. Due to technical limitations, however, the vertically and horizontally squeezed images had to be on separate reels. Amazingly, less than a year later, with *Une Visite aux merveilles de l'Exposition coloniale,* Chretien had devised a projecting lens that could be adjusted during projection, permitting both vertically and laterally squeezed images to be cut together with normal images on the same reel.

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statements made at the time. In effect, general CinemaScope practice was never as unthinking as Pinel assumes.

Early in his discussion, Bordwell tries to determine whether there was a formula for the disposition of actors within the CinemaScope frame. He assumes that directors and cinematographers might have divided the frame roughly into fifths, keeping interest focused in the central three-fifths during shot/reverse shot passages. As I have argued elsewhere, the most common division of the frame is into quarters. Such a division emphasizes the center of the frame, something Bordwell recognizes, and keeps interest focused in the center quarters of the frame. Dividing the frame into quarters further supports Bordwell's argument that the adoption of CinemaScope was managed though the adjustment of classical norms, because the central quarters at 1:2.35 are only slightly smaller than the entire Academy ratio image. (The central quarters were exactly the same size as the older format when CinemaScope was the full 1:2.66 ratio). Thus during shot/reverse shot cutting in CinemaScope films actors are usually positioned on what would have been the outermost edges of the Academy frame.

All in all, despite some contributors' unquestioning reliance upon received opinion, *Le Cinemascope entre art et industrie/Cinemascope between Art and Industry* is a welcome addition to the very limited literature devoted to widescreen filmmaking.

Marshall Deutelbaum teaches courses in film history and theory at Purdue University. His essay, "Basic Principles of Anamorphic Composition," appeared in *Film History* 15.1 (2003).

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The Coen Brothers' *Fargo*

Edited by William G. Luhr. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003. $55.00 cloth; $21.99 paper.

Series editor Andrew Horton states that Cambridge Film Handbooks offer a "prism" approach to the study of individual films by offering "students and general readers valuable background and insight into [their] cinematic, artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical importance." Joel and Ethan Coen's *Fargo* (1996) is an ideal text for such multifaceted treatment. A commercial film produced on the margins of the industry (affording the writer/director/producer duo a great deal of independence and control), *Fargo* managed to achieve significant box-office success (at least for a film of this type) and awards from both Hollywood (two Academy Award wins and five other nominations) and the quite different juries in Cannes, the British Academy, and the New York Film Critics Circle. As William Luhr suggests, moreover, *Fargo* usefully typifies the kind of slick, marketable "independent" filmmaking that, emerging in the 1980s, has continued to be an important element in the American industry ever since; *Fargo* provides insight "into significant recent trends in both the film industry and American culture." There is no disputing that conclusion. Most would agree as well that the film is "a haunting and delightful one that explores middle-American themes and settings from an original and unsettling perspective, that challenges traditional cinematic genre structures, and that comments on American racial, gender, and cultural traditions."

The texts collected here explore that thematic richness from a variety of critical and methodological perspectives, although, somewhat disappointingly, the book offers less engagement with how the film, and the work of the Coens in general, relates to "recent trends" in the film industry. There is some discussion, in the long review-essay by David Sterritt, of how the Coenian oeuvre connects with those of noted contemporaries (Todd Haynes, Steven Soderbergh, and David Lynch, for example) and with what might be termed postmodern filmmaking, but it is very brief and general. Another, perhaps more problematic, feature of the book is that much here has already been published and is readily available. If we include Luhr's introduction, only six of the volume's 11 offerings here make their initial appearance in print. If *Fargo,* the curious reader might ask, is a film worthy of the kind of attention a separate volume by diverse hands might afford, why was the decision made not to commission all new work? This is the policy followed, at least generally, by the Cambridge Companion series for literary text, genres, and authors. John Belton's volume on *Rear Window* for the Cambridge handbook series contains exclusively new work, except for some brief excerpts from the 1954 reviews. Why should a significant film merit less?

We might question, in particular, the decision to republish the reviews by Harvey Roy Greenberg and Thomas Doherty, which, like Sterritt's wide-ranging essay and Luhr's own introduction, cover pretty much the same ground and with very similar enthusiasm for this film and for the directing duo. Though there are certainly critics on the contemporary scene such as Emannuel Levy who think little of the Coens, there is no attempt here to juxtapose positive and negative views of their work and establish some dialogue about its central qualities (emotional disconnection, postmodern pastiche, and black humor, for example). The result is that three of the book's sections overlap too much and, as one might expect from three journalistic critics, are more evaluative that analytical. Unfortunately, Luhr's own chapter also reads very much like a review; it too covers a host of issues and topics, ranging from the film's connection to classic and neo-noir as well as to various forms of genre-remaking (though without reference here to the oft-quoted Fredric Jameson on this issue, or to more recent critics such as Jim Collins) and finally to character analysis.

Sterritt's essay provides some useful insights (especially his comments on the film's deployment of carnivalism and grotesquerie as social critique), but these are not developed in depth or at length. For the reader interested in a more penetrating focus on the cultural and cinematic issues raised by the film, the book's most important section will be the three newly commissioned articles at its center by Pamela Grace, Christopher Sharrett, and Mikita Brottman.

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Sharrett finds the film a "critique of American civilization, particularly the late twentieth-century family and community" (55). But he does not find this critique altogether pleasing, since it seems "to have partaken fully of a particularly noxious current of postmodern liberal sensibility, namely a need to affirm what is simultaneously belittled" (56). This, at least, is Sharrett's take on the heavily ironized binary at the heart of the film, its juxtaposition of the terrifyingly extraordinary and the banal everyday in the manner of bourgeois neo-noir thrillers, which Foster Hirsch identified as "melodramas of mischance." Sharrett's essay, however, is richer and wider ranging than such a brief summary suggests, since it attempts to read and "place" the numerous cultural references in the film, including, perhaps most importantly, the story of Paul Bunyan.

Brottman's piece, like that of Grace, is more narrowly focused, adopting a Bakhtinian perspective on the film's playful representations of the body, as it presents "a series of anatomical images that is essentially a reiteration of the human body *out of control* [emphasis in original], and thereby made comic and ridiculous" (81). The most grotesque of these grotesque bodies is that of the feckless kidnapper played by Steve Buscemi.

Fans of the Coens, and of postmodern filmmaking in general, will find much that is interesting and valuable in these three essays. Grace, Sharrett, and Brottman demonstrate that *Fargo* is indeed a very rich text, worthy of extended critical attention. It is unfortunate that Luhr did not make such original work the focus of this collection of essays. The Coens, and *Fargo* in particular, deserve better.

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The Dream Life

Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties

By J. Hoberman. New York: The New Press, 2003. $29.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

As its title suggests, J. Hoberman's *The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties* is nothing if not ambitious. Intended as a sweeping work of cultural criticism in the tradition of Susan Sontag, Pauline Kael, Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, and especially Hoberman's acknowledged model, Siegfried Kracauer, the book undertakes what might be termed a psychological-mythic examination of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon eras in order to chart the gradual dissolution of unifying cultural mythologies and the emergence of "two Americas" united within a single, all-encompassing hyperreality. Yet the book is hardly meant to be an exhaustive account of films of the period; rather, as in Kracauer's own *From Caligari to Hitler,* key films are selected as symbolic/allegorical reflections of the nation's dream life, mirrors of the subterranean anxieties developing beneath the socio-political surface of Cold War America.

In Kennedy, Hoberman argues, America had elected a romantic, media-savvy Freedom Fighter, a veritable action hero who created and embodied a new unifying Zeitgeist by linking the liberation of oppressed peoples with a necessary vigilance against the Communist threat—*Spartacus* reconciled with *The Alamo*. Yet Kennedy's showmanship and unprecedented image-consciousness hardly prevented him from unwittingly defining not simply the dream life but also its "night terrors" (67)—a growing specter of paranoia, secrecy, and demagoguery, fueled by his exploitation of the relentless crises of his presidency. Thus even as the Media Star/Consumer-in-Chief enjoys reading *The Manchurian Candidate, Fail Safe,* and *Seven Days in May,* these texts nonetheless evoke the murky underside of Camelot's gloss, the unpleasant subtext to "America's first and most compelling miniseries" (43). Even as Kennedy fancies himself as James Bond, plotting against a Cuban Dr. No, Bond himself also mythically conjures the lone gunman, the secret agent of subterfuge, the mysterious assassin who will bring the Kennedy era itself to a sudden, calamitous close.

With Kennedy's assassination, the paranoid dream life cries out for a new unifying myth, and receives it in Cowboy President Lyndon Johnson, who defeats Cowboy rival Barry Goldwater. But by now the psychic damage is done, and not even the tireless efforts of Über-Cowboy John Wayne can stop the bleeding. Wayne's pro-Goldwater *McLintock!* cannot stem the tide of disillusion in the twilight Westerns *Lonely Are the Brave, Hud, Major Dundee,* and *The Chase,* and as the Vietnam engagement escalates, it seems undeniable that "bloody mayhem" now lies at the core of "national self-understanding" (163). Within the new arena of the hyperreal, the Black Panthers become media figures, the Tet offensive is horrifically memorialized in a photograph by Eddie Adams, and the Chicago Democratic National Convention becomes a TV circus. On screen, *Bonnie and Clyde* offers the anti-authoritarian Righteous Outlaw as pop star while elevating the cool, disaffected (so-called) New Sentimentality to the level of Tom Wolfe's "pornoviolence." *Easy Rider* follows suit with self-conscious post-western mythopoeia; *Alice's Restaurant* projects a generation "already understood as doomed" (237); and *Wild in the Streets* prophesies/allegorizes it all: "Yippie fantasies, Wallace nightmares, student uprisings at Columbia and in Paris, Chinese Red Guards, the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns, and Chicago" (199).

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With Kennedy's assassination, the paranoid dream life cries out for a new unifying myth, and receives it in Cowboy President Lyndon Johnson, who defeats Cowboy rival Barry Goldwater. But by now the psychic damage is done, and not even the tireless efforts of Über-Cowboy John Wayne can stop the bleeding. Wayne's pro-Goldwater *McLintock!* cannot stem the tide of disillusion in the twilight Westerns *Lonely Are the Brave, Hud, Major Dundee,* and *The Chase,* and as the Vietnam engagement escalates, it seems undeniable that "bloody mayhem" now lies at the core of "national self-understanding" (163). Within the new arena of the hyperreal, the Black Panthers become media figures, the Tet offensive is horrifically memorialized in a photograph by Eddie Adams, and the Chicago Democratic National Convention becomes a TV circus. On screen, *Bonnie and Clyde* offers the anti-authoritarian Righteous Outlaw as pop star while elevating the cool, disaffected (so-called) New Sentimentality to the level of Tom Wolfe's "pornoviolence." *Easy Rider* follows suit with self-conscious post-western mythopoeia; *Alice's Restaurant* projects a generation "already understood as doomed" (237); and *Wild in the Streets* prophesies/allegorizes it all: "Yippie fantasies, Wallace nightmares, student uprisings at Columbia and in Paris, Chinese Red Guards, the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns, and Chicago" (199).

As the 1960s grind on into the 1970s, countercultural mythos descends into allegories of orgiastic chaos (*Myra Breckinridge, Skidoo*) and social disintegration (*Night of the Living Dead, Little Big Man, Soldier Blue*), even as select filmmakers—Jodorowsky, Laughlin, Van Peebles—themselves appropriate the Righteous Outlaw persona. But it is too late for the Righteous Outlaw, and indeed for the counterculture itself, as both will now come under siege from the reactionary Legal Vigilantes of *Joe, Dirty Harry, Walking Tall,* and *Death Wish*. The Orgy fizzles away with *The Last Movie, Shampoo,* and the McGovern campaign, as self-loathing paranoia reaches its nadir in the Watergate-era thrillers *Executive Action, The Parallax View,* and *Blow Out*. By the time Ronald Reagan survives his own assassination attempt and becomes America's new leading man, the ugly schism in American mythos is symbolically effaced.

This is obviously a highly complex and sweeping argument, and *The Dream Life* makes for complex, dense reading. The strength of the book—and its mark of distinction within an increasingly crowded field—lies in Hoberman's almost fetishistic passion for detail, which enables him to create his own sense of hyperreality that engulfs us, making us feel as if we too are privileged witnesses to cultural history in the making. The author's visceral engagement with his material sets his enterprise apart from scholarly works with which it otherwise shares key interests and assumptions: at once more nuanced than Robert Ray's *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema,* and more accessible for the lay reader than David James's *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* and Paul Monaco's recent *The Sixties*, *The Dream Life* is something of a triumph of painstaking research into contemporary cultural and political discourse. The results are often fascinating and at times genuinely jaw-dropping: Robert Benton and David Newman define the "New Sentimentality," then go on to write *Bonnie and Clyde*; George Wallace is greeted in Milwaukee in 1964 by "700 partisans singing 'Dixie'—in Polish!" (109); Sam Peckinpah nurses hemorrhoids and employs concubines while filming *The Wild Bunch*; spiritually enlightened *Zabriskie Point* star Mark Frechette feuds with Antonioni over the film's overly political nature and forces changes in the script; Melvin Van Peebles is inspired to make *Sweet Sweetback* after a revelatory moment while masturbating in the Mojave desert.

Yet the abundance of such minutiae in *The Dream Life* is ultimately something of a mixed blessing. While frequently gripping, especially for the non-specialist in American political history, it also serves to mask some of the real deficiencies underlying Hoberman's enterprise. The wealth of detail helps to establish important links between agents of film culture and agents of social/political history—allowing us to grasp the connections between, say, Kennedy and *Fail Safe,* or *McLintock!* and Goldwater—but at the same time it often implies that history is a sort of matrix of secret connections which lead us forward in ways that we (unlike our author) cannot fully grasp. Thus when Hoberman notes that on "September 15 [1963], the first Sunday after *Shock Corridor* opened, a bomb exploded in a Birmingham church, killing four black children" (85), or that Fonda and Hopper resumed production of *Easy Rider* as "Operation Pegasus [broke] the siege of Khe Sanh" (197), he risks blurring the line between relevant context and mythic conspiracy. When, in little over a single paragraph, he explicitly connects *The Magnificent Seven* to Arthur Schlesinger, JFK, the CIA, Eugene Burdick's *The Ugly American,* interventionist foreign policy, the space program, the Peace Corps, the Green Berets, and the defunct amusement park Freedomland U.S.A., he risks making his accomplished research morph into a monolithic, paranoid vision.

The problem isn't so much that Hoberman's history tends to be teleological in the extreme, as teleology seems appropriate enough when one is arguing—á la Kracauer—that collective fantasies can "yearn[ ] for realization" (181), or that as mythic expressions, films can act as prophecies for future events. Rather, the core issue is that the psychological-mythic approach—here given a vaguely structuralist spin, complete with implied binary oppositions—is itself loaded with potential land mines, yet remains almost entirely unexamined and undefended. To argue, as Hoberman does, that movies can serve as the "materialization of inchoate group fantasies" (3) or that "imagined communities yearn to reflect and hence experience themselves" (8) is to invite a host of basic questions about underlying assumptions. How exactly do films reflect society? How does cultural mythology relate to the culture industries? Why do some films seem to reflect cultural/social myth better than others? Should the apparently allegorical narratives of privileged movies count as cultural evidence, and should they count more than the less allegorical (or less allegorically relevant) narratives of other contemporary movies? Such questions are relevant to any study of this kind, such as Ray's *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema,* James's *Allegories of Cinema,* Robin Wood's *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan,* or indeed the bulk of Parker Tyler's critical oeuvre—yet to their credit, Ray, James, Wood, and Tyler all eloquently defend their projects, and their methods, before plunging ahead.

In the absence of such a defense, *The Dream Life* leaves these key issues hanging, and Hoberman only exacerbates the problem by repeatedly transcending agency in order to provide the impression of a cultural matrix reproducing itself as some great force of collective destiny. As a result, I kept wondering about all the presumably relevant films not discussed here (*Putney Swope, The Shooting, Winter Kills,* along with the top box-office earners of the era) and ruminating about potentially useful cultural/intellectual contexts: the Beats, postmodernism, Henry Nash Smith's notion of the Garden/Desert opposition in America's mythos of the West, Pauline Kael and Parker Tyler's own mid-1960s discussions of the Orgy/Wild Party as a motif in contemporary European cinema. While *The Dream Life* is undeniably engaging, informative, and frequently provocative, its author ultimately risks overplaying his hand; the book's micro-level density threatens to drown out its genuine strengths, obscuring its nuanced arguments in a

wash of details while eschewing those conceptual footings that might have served to under gird its basic claims.

Greg Taylor is Associate Professor of Film at Purchase College, SUNY, and the author of *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

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Film as Religion

Myths, Morals, and Rituals

By John C. Lyden. New York: New York University Press, 2003. $60.00 cloth; $20.00 paper.

John C. Lyden's *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* sets forth an interesting proposal for how the study of religion and film should proceed. His hostility and condescension toward the literature of film studies, however, remarkably diminishes the book's usefulness.

Lyden's book is divided into two major parts. The first outlines a methodological proposal; the second discusses a number of film genres and closely analyzes several films. Lyden's central thesis is that films should be understood and analyzed as religious phenomena. In the rituals of both religion and filmgoing, audiences enter a socially liminal space where they confront and resolve difficult existential and emotional conflicts through transgressive pleasure and psychic catharsis before returning to the mundane world. By repeating this process, communities sustain the energy to build the imagined reality or, at least, to survive in the world regardless of social change. Relying on his central thesis, Lyden proposes a particular understanding of inter-religious dialogue as the best model for interdisciplinary work in religion and film. Contemporary approaches on inter-religious dialogue and comparative religion that seek to respect the integrity of the various traditions being compared provide remarkably helpful models for interdisciplinary encounters. Lyden's proposal demonstrates that religious studies has sophisticated analytical tools that may be helpful to film studies scholars in understanding the place and function of moviegoing in the lives of spectators. Moreover, Lyden has shown that religion scholars can learn something about the nature of ritual in the lives of contemporary Americans by paying attention to patterns and practices surrounding film viewing.

Throughout the book, Lyden provides a number of lucid summaries of difficult theoretical material. In outlining his understanding of film viewing as a religious experience, Lyden reviews the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, ritual-studies doyenne Catharine Bell, and various theorists of myth. In the opening chapter of the book, Lyden provides a critical, but sympathetic, summary of the major works in the study of religion and film. Lyden's taxonomy of these works into theological and ideological clusters is a useful, if contestable, attempt to create order in an ever-burgeoning field of literature.

Lyden's argument could be clearer on certain points. He never explicitly articulates the precise connections between Geertz and Bell that seem apparent to him. In addition, in the second half of the book, he references his methodological approach in only the most superficial way. Because Lyden has put forth an interesting methodological proposal, a more explicit articulation of how it guided his analysis would have been helpful.

Lyden's most useful contribution is his invocation of inter-religious dialogue as a methodological frame for interdisciplinary work. Unfortunately, Lyden does not adhere to an approach that respects both disciplines as equal conversation partners. Lyden characterizes his approach as one that uncovers the common sense meaning of films as opposed to those that "seek to uncover hidden meanings . . . that can be detected only by the scholar who is trained in abstruse methods of analysis" (5). As the reader soon discovers, such scholars are those engaging in ideological criticism or those wedded to psychoanalytic approaches. The ideological critic is presented as a bogeyman of whom the religious studies scholar should beware. "If religion scholars are to bring the insights of film studies into their own filmic analyses, they should realize that the field of film studies may represent a Trojan horse out of which could pour an army of hostile soldiers who are just as happy to reduce religion to ideology as to view film in this way" (32). In the entire book, Lyden references only one psychoanalytic critic by name. Taking as representative Leland Poague's interpretation of *It's a Wonderful Life,* Lyden relies on a secondary source that provides a summary and critique of Poague's argument. The reader of Lyden's book, then, is several steps removed from Poague's actual argument and given no context for understanding whether Poague's approach is representative or authoritative in the field. Even on its own terms, however, Lyden's appeal to "common sense" meaning assumes that film texts are sufficiently transparent and need no theoretical explication. Any interpreter of religious meaning who sought to study only rituals or sacred texts and bypass the "abstruse" theological accretions surrounding them would certainly not be taken seriously as a scholar of religion. Lyden's treatment of scholars and scholarship across the disciplinary divide is neither academically responsible nor respectful.

Aside from issues of responsibility and respect, Lyden's film analyses could be bolstered by existing film scholarship. Throughout his book, Lyden argues for the importance of ethnographic research into actual audience responses to films. While noting that such research is both difficult to obtain and sometimes unhelpful, thus attempting to justify his failure to cite or produce it, he fails to rely on any of the studies that do exist. When analyzing melodramas, he makes no reference to Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*; when analyzing the *Star Wars* trilogy, he makes no reference to Will Brooker's excellent study *Using the Force*; when analyzing horror films, he makes no reference to Rhona Berenstein's historical study *Attack of the Leading Ladies*. Similarly, when discussing melodrama, and responding to critics who dismiss these films as sexist, ar-

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Lyden has articulated a well-defined methodology that relies on some of the best resources religious studies can bring to the table. The hostility and disdain Lyden expresses toward film studies scholarship, however, will prevent his book from being well received by film scholars. Moreover, Lyden's failure to reference central works in the film studies canon which support his analyses also undercuts the book's usefulness to religious studies scholars who want to follow his methodological approach. Lyden's book is a fine start in demonstrating how religious studies can assist in the project of understanding how audiences make meaning at the movies. Any future work, however, will have to take Lyden's admonitions about the nature of productive inter-religious dialogue seriously by responding more respectfully and completely to the sophisticated, nuanced work of film studies scholarship.

Kent Brintnall is a doctoral student in the Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University working on the intersection of theories of cinematic violence and theologies of the crucifixion.

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Godard

A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy

By Colin MacCabe. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003. $17.00.

Colin MacCabe has had a long, productive fascination with Jean-Luc Godard, film practice, and culture. The fruit of his enduring respect and curiosity is *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy*. The allusion in the subtitle to James Joyce is also central to the structure and purpose of this very personal tribute to Godard's life and work. MacCabe's new study is organized around "a specific set of angles" that determine the focus of the five main chapters. However, if MacCabe's preface suggests that the individual chapters offer slightly independent perspectives on Godard's life and cinema, several recurring motifs and strategies accumulate across the book, lending thematic unity. This is not to say that *Godard* unfolds in an efficient, linear fashion. In fact, the book's structure will appear to some readers as a sort of pastiche of Godard's own narrative style, with digressions, ellipses, and delayed explanations. However, MacCabe's distinctive approach is all his own, and already evident in his 1980 book, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*. While this may not be "the" history of Godard—but one of many Godard deserves—it is certainly one of the more insightful we are likely to receive.

MacCabe explains in his preface that he considers Godard one of the most important European artists of the last 50 years, and that his ambition for this book is to find a larger audience for all of Godard's films. By the end, MacCabe will assert that Godard is also the most important French poet of the twentieth century. Whether this is the text to motivate new viewers to investigate Godard's career is uncertain, but it should prove a productive place for those already intrigued with the difficulty and richness of Godard to look for new clues as to how to connect the director and his creative work to factors as diverse as his family, post-World War II European culture, and Brigitte Bardot. The first chapter, "Gods and Demi-Gods: The Monods and the Godards," provides a lively background history of the Godard family, including details of Jean-Luc's increasingly erratic behavior in his late teens and twenties. MacCabe has been quite fortunate in obtaining interviews with Godard as well as key members of his wealthy, intellectual family. Recurring themes include Godard's clever punning, but also his restlessness, unruly behavior, and even thefts.

MacCabe's second chapter, "The Cinema Is Not a Bad School," provides a good, tight overview of Godard's intellectual influences. Paris proves a fertile ground for the impatient young artist, and MacCabe leaps about in "montage style" to touch on a wide range of contexts, from T. S. Eliot to Sartre to the Cinémathèque's Henri Langlois. MacCabe gives deserved attention to Godard's early criticism, where he wrote alongside Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut, but the most important historical move is to establish André Bazin's significance for Godard's thinking and eventual filmmaking. Bazin's "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" is cited as "absolutely crucial to understanding Godard's oeuvre" (62). It is refreshing to read about Bazin's importance for Godard's career-long exploration of realism and film style: "For Godard, there is not reality and then the camera—there is reality seized at this moment and in this way by the camera" (79). Bazin's influence is never far away. MacCabe points out that even Godard's auteurist attraction to Hitchcock's modernity "is understood in Bazinian terms. What interests in Hitchcock is not the tedious detective story, but the perfect seizing of a cityscape or an object" (80). However, during the discussions of Hollywood, Hitchcock, and auteurism, MacCabe narrows Godard's own criticism a bit too severely to several articles. Nonetheless, this chapter covers Godard's introduction into film culture and his first short movies as it prepares the stage for the New Wave and the rise of Godard as a cultural figure continually grappling with cinema's past and future.

"A Certain Tendency of French Film Production: The New Wave of Karina and Coutard" begins only tangentially

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"A Certain Tendency of French Film Production: The New Wave of Karina and Coutard" begins only tangentially

connected to Godard, but eventually summarizes major moments from *Breathless* to *Made in USA*. From this chapter on there is brief reference to most of Godard's films, but it is not always clear why some projects get more attention than others, and MacCabe is only intermittently interested in specifics about their production, story, or style. But he is fascinated with the relationship between male director and actress, so Anna Karina's presence proves the organizing force of Chapter Three, just as Anne Wiazemsky and Anne-Marie Miéville dominate the subsequent chapters. Throughout the study, MacCabe seems to hesitate over which private details are necessary and which are best left unsaid, especially in Godard's relationships with his actresses and wives. It is not an easy decision, and he avoids the tell-all strategies of some Alfred Hitchcock and François Truffaut biographies. Moreover, parts of the manuscript were read in advance by Godard and Miéville, as well as Claude and Véronique Godard, which must complicate the issue for MacCabe.

"Student Revolution: Wiazemsky and Gorin," offers a perspective on Godard's often frantic attempts to engage with youthful rebellion and academic political theories. This is the era of bold ideological moves, phony posturing, but also breaks with the past, including Godard's definitive quarrel with Truffaut. There are too few insights about Wiazemsky's marriage to Godard, and eventually MacCabe clumsily dismisses her, as well as Karina: "Both women had come to him as images—they were creations from the screen, not real women" (226). Miéville will fare much better. Jean-Pierre Gorin, co-founder of the Dziga Vertov Group, also has a tortured, collaborative relationship with Godard that initially proved disappointing: "The next five films [beginning with *British Sounds*] . . . are in some simple sense unwatchable—the premise of each is that the image is unable to provide the knowledge that it claims" (216). With the more critically successful *Tout va bien* they still proved unable to find an audience (or happiness), motivating Godard's reflection on his place in media production and eventual moves to Grenoble and then Rolle, Switzerland.

Chapter Five, "The Arrière-Boutique: Anne-Marie Miéville and Rolle," returns to increased consideration of Godard's roots and the importance of a stabilizing influence, in the form of his companion since the 1970s, photographer and filmmaker Miéville. During this stage of Godard's life, his restlessness gradually dissipates and his explorations turn more to essays on love and death than political movements. Montaigne replaces Mao. This is an era of "searching for meaning rather than dictating," and thanks to Miéville, Godard finds a new faith in the image and technology, looping back productively to Bazin, the real, and a desire to record everything. While dates are not always clear during this chapter, MacCabe also enters more personally into the frame. He recounts visits to Godard and some of his productions. However, while MacCabe discusses here the material context of much of Godard's work of the past 30 years, readers hoping for a better understanding of the 1980s and '90s movies may come away disappointed. MacCabe summarizes the series of films between *King Lear* and *Forever Mozart* as having "much that is brilliant and wonderful," but concludes that in these films "there is something irreducibly private" (294). The promise of a book such as this should be to lend more insight into that personal world of dense references and inconclusive fragments.

But the contexts and discussions of *Sauve qui peut, Passion* ("one of the great works of European modernism"), and *Histoire(s) du cinéma* allow more attention to Godard's later strategies. *Histoire(s)* proves the capstone work, since it explores Godard's own place in society and allows MacCabe to compare him to Joyce and *Finnegan's Wake,* an analogy that returns in the personal, final, "Envoi" section. There, *Eloge de l'amour* serves fittingly as the exemplary Godard: "All narrative summaries of Godard's films are misleading because the films proceed by montage rather than story. Here the montage is between the American present and the French past" (326). Here too MacCabe ponders the complexity that makes up Godard's life and work: "Some of it is very uneven. But the worst is never less than intelligent, and the best is the best there is."

While MacCabe's portrait of the artist presents many compelling observations on Godard's life and career, this study reserves little space for evidence of his significance. MacCabe asserts that Godard is a great poet and philosopher, but the concrete examples from his productions remain underexplored. Thus, while the book does provide many terrific glimpses of Godard, and openly struggles with contextualizing Godard's significance, it occasionally backs away from the more troubling and challenging aspects of assessing this amazing director. It is still unclear to me, for instance, whether Godard's legendary rudeness is just an act or a troubling psychological symptom, whether he is deeply sexist or an engaged feminist, or whether this man who critiques social language thinks before he speaks (as when he responded to news of Truffaut's brain tumor with "That's what happens when you read so many bad books"). *Godard* the book, like Godard the man, remains an intriguing study. Moreover, this is an attractive text, with a low price and high production values; MacCabe, the press, and research assistant Sally Shafto should be commended.

Richard Neupert, author of *A History of the French New Wave Cinema,* teaches film studies at the University of Georgia.

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Hearing Film

Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music

By Anahid Kassabian. New York: Routledge, 2001. $99.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Since the 1980s, the use of popular music in American movies has increased quite dramatically, yet scholarship over this same period has tended to remain focused on ana-

connected to Godard, but eventually summarizes major moments from *Breathless* to *Made in USA*. From this chapter on there is brief reference to most of Godard's films, but it is not always clear why some projects get more attention than others, and MacCabe is only intermittently interested in specifics about their production, story, or style. But he is fascinated with the relationship between male director and actress, so Anna Karina's presence proves the organizing force of Chapter Three, just as Anne Wiazemsky and Anne-Marie Miéville dominate the subsequent chapters. Throughout the study, MacCabe seems to hesitate over which private details are necessary and which are best left unsaid, especially in Godard's relationships with his actresses and wives. It is not an easy decision, and he avoids the tell-all strategies of some Alfred Hitchcock and François Truffaut biographies. Moreover, parts of the manuscript were read in advance by Godard and Miéville, as well as Claude and Véronique Godard, which must complicate the issue for MacCabe.

"Student Revolution: Wiazemsky and Gorin," offers a perspective on Godard's often frantic attempts to engage with youthful rebellion and academic political theories. This is the era of bold ideological moves, phony posturing, but also breaks with the past, including Godard's definitive quarrel with Truffaut. There are too few insights about Wiazemsky's marriage to Godard, and eventually MacCabe clumsily dismisses her, as well as Karina: "Both women had come to him as images—they were creations from the screen, not real women" (226). Miéville will fare much better. Jean-Pierre Gorin, co-founder of the Dziga Vertov Group, also has a tortured, collaborative relationship with Godard that initially proved disappointing: "The next five films [beginning with *British Sounds*] . . . are in some simple sense unwatchable—the premise of each is that the image is unable to provide the knowledge that it claims" (216). With the more critically successful *Tout va bien* they still proved unable to find an audience (or happiness), motivating Godard's reflection on his place in media production and eventual moves to Grenoble and then Rolle, Switzerland.

Chapter Five, "The Arrière-Boutique: Anne-Marie Miéville and Rolle," returns to increased consideration of Godard's roots and the importance of a stabilizing influence, in the form of his companion since the 1970s, photographer and filmmaker Miéville. During this stage of Godard's life, his restlessness gradually dissipates and his explorations turn more to essays on love and death than political movements. Montaigne replaces Mao. This is an era of "searching for meaning rather than dictating," and thanks to Miéville, Godard finds a new faith in the image and technology, looping back productively to Bazin, the real, and a desire to record everything. While dates are not always clear during this chapter, MacCabe also enters more personally into the frame. He recounts visits to Godard and some of his productions. However, while MacCabe discusses here the material context of much of Godard's work of the past 30 years, readers hoping for a better understanding of the 1980s and '90s movies may come away disappointed. MacCabe summarizes the series of films between *King Lear* and *Forever Mozart* as having "much that is brilliant and wonderful," but concludes that in these films "there is something irreducibly private" (294). The promise of a book such as this should be to lend more insight into that personal world of dense references and inconclusive fragments.

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Since the 1980s, the use of popular music in American movies has increased quite dramatically, yet scholarship over this same period has tended to remain focused on ana-

lyzing film music from the classical Hollywood period. Shifting attention from the composed score of classical film music to the "compiled" score of such films as *Thelma and Louise* and *Dangerous Minds,* Anahid Kassabian's *Hearing Film* marks a departure not only in material but also in method, bridging the Marxist orientation in popular music studies and the psychoanalytic one in feminist film theory. But the book's most far-reaching contribution entails shifting discussion from the production of film music or its status as a text to its still under-theorized reception by audiences, in which listening functions not peripherally but crucially, in the process of identity-formation and subjectivity.

While benefiting from a body of work that has essentially defined the field, in particular Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987), Kathryn Kalinak's *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (1992), and Caryl Flinn's *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (1992), *Hearing Film* underlines how such work on classical Hollywood film music cannot fully account for the changed conditions of contemporary film music. For example, Gorbman's principles of invisibility and "inaudibility" summoned to explain the "unconscious" role of scoring in the classical period seem rather inadequate, if not inappropriate, to a current cinema frequently featuring pop songs —loudly and clearly—to motivate narrative development. Seizing then upon this trend toward cinema's incorporation of popular music, *Hearing Film* builds on Jeff Smith's *The Sounds of Commerce* (1998), which charts the rise of the compilation score (with its roots in the rock n' roll movies of the 1950s) and the increasingly pivotal role of the music supervisor since the 1970s.

For Kassabian, the key difference in the cultural work these newer scoring and compiling practices perform is in the way each elicits or "tracks" identifications for spectators, or what she terms here "perceivers." While the composed score of classical Hollywood largely forges "assimilating" identifications—the audible cueing of responses that suture spectators into a single subject position—the compiled scores of many contemporary films often engender what Kassabian calls "affiliating identifications," a play of difference and recognition that "can permit resistances and allow multiple and mobile identifications" (139). She writes: "If offers of assimilating identifications try to narrow the psychic field, then offers of affiliating identifications open it wide" (3). In such films as *Desert Hearts* and *Thelma and Louise,* pop songs serve to interpellate perceivers across a range of competences in cultural discourses, from filmgoing to pop music cultures. Unlike the "closed" intertextual system of classical scoring (an altogether hide-bound school indebted to the late-Romantic tradition in Western art music), soundtracks dependent on more familiar songs bring the "threat of history" to bear on the ways in which the film can be read (and heard). Given the degree to which these "prior relationships with music" heard elsewhere inform and inflect one's reception, such "extrafilmic life" largely ignored by text-based criticism contributes to the filmic experience by weaving "a web of memory, emotion, and identification" (70).

Here we might note Kassabian's cultural studies "turn" toward the historicity of the encounter between sound and subject, one that stages a perceiver's engagement with both a palpable present and a retrievable past. And here too resides a note of difference from that seemingly lost, and thus idealized, past haunting both classical film music and certain strains in contemporary critical theory, both of which exhibit, as Flinn's psychoanalytic reading demonstrates, nostalgic utopias, the yearning for which returns one to a regressive state of pre-Oedipal plenitude.

The majority of films examined in *Hearing Film* involve a complex range of female narrative agents, thereby acknowledging a certain distance traveled from the unyielding dichotomy of the fallen woman and the virtuous wife that Kalinak scrutinizes in Hollywood films of the 1940s and '50s. Yet Kassabian also offers close readings of such films as *Mississippi Masala* and *Corrina, Corrina,* in which questions of sexual difference become overdetermined by those of race and ethnicity. While suggesting the various ways through which the more "open scores" of these films make cross-identification possible for diverse audiences, *Hearing Film* also interrogates the contemporaneous resurgence of classical scoring in such action-adventure fare as *The Hunt for Red October* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom,* the scores of which "track identifications with a particular U.S. national subject" (94). As Kassabian argues, "[t]he ability for perceivers to shift positions within the fantasy scenarios offered by these films is carefully limited" (108), such that the audible drive toward a single path of identification unsurprisingly becomes ideologically aligned with "hegemonic masculinity" and American nationalism. Although wary of this return of the authoritarian personality to film music, Kassabian's empathic analysis of the potential for relational and intersubjective experiences through film sound is finally more an ethical than a political imperative.

By book's end one might have wished for a thicker historical context here, since many of the films examined in *Hearing Film* seem to symptomatically provide a soundtrack of the culture wars of the Reagan-Gingrich era, just as one could have wished for a larger sampling of films that either illuminate or elude the structural opposition between assimilating and affiliating identifications. Such minor quibbling notwithstanding, for film and media scholars pursuing questions of scoring, song, and soundtrack work, *Hearing Film* adds its pronounced voice to a lively set of concerns and debates amplified in such recent volumes as *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (edited by Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, 2001) and *Popular Music and Film* (edited by Ian Inglis, 2003). Kassabian's theoretical precision in particular is a welcome addition, exemplifying a rather nimble dialectic between, on the one hand, the historical materialism of popular music studies—work that has too often valorized agency at the expense of subject-positioning—and, on the other, the psychoanalytic model of feminist film theory

that, in its original configuration, over-emphasized the circumscribing of desire through textual determination. And, by focusing so intently on popular music soundtracks and their reception, *Hearing Film* contributes to the emerging field of sound studies, an interdisciplinary range of approaches exploring the ways in which subjectivity is constituted through sound and aurality.

Tony Grajeda is Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies in the Department of English at the University of Central Florida.

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James Whale

A New World of Gods and Monsters

By James Curtis. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. $19.95.

Bride of Frankenstein is, of course, one of the great monster movies, a picture most famous for a pair of indelible performances—Boris Karloff's iconic turn as the heavy-limbed "monster" and Elsa Lanchester's twitching, bird-like take on the title role. Yet there is also a sly brand of humor at work in *Bride,* and for this, praise is due to director James Whale.

Two very funny moments that stick in the mind: Early in the film a woman is pursued by the monster. About to feel the ghoul's grip tighten around her frail torso, she locks eyes with the camera and gives what can only be described as a look of absurdist, almost gleeful terror—she has never been this frightened in her life, and she couldn't be happier about it. Later comes a more obviously humorous moment. Ernest Thesiger's Dr. Pretorius, a mad scientist if ever there was one, has decided to create a mate for Karloff's monster, a task he will accomplish by reanimating a female corpse. Prying open the coffin of this young unfortunate, Pretorius declares her a "pretty little thing." He then delivers one of the darkest comic lines in the history of the movies: "I hope her bones are firm."

As evidenced by his biographies of Preston Sturges and W.C. Fields, the film historian James Curtis has long appreciated the cultural importance of cinematic humor. But sometime after the publication of his 1982 book on Whale, Curtis began to worry that he had not "done justice" to the director known for *The Invisible Man, Showboat,* and his two Frankenstein films. And so, as he explains at the outset of his authoritative and stunningly thorough *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters,* Curtis, in 1993, "began researching his life all over again—and rewriting it from scratch."

Curtis's unorthodox decision to have a second go at his subject has yielded commendable results. A smartly written and exhaustive biography that is neither overly reverent nor trivially prurient, Curtis's *New World* is packed with insight into the process that created a series of seminal monster films. He does an equally fine job of recalling the culture of Hollywood in the 1930s. And he peppers his book with significant sketches of Whale regulars such as Thesiger, Karloff, and Colin Clive, with cameos from Bette David, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Paul Robeson, Claude Rains, and an entire backlot of others.

Part of the mission of this book—the title comes from a toast "to a new world of gods and monsters" offered by Thesiger's Pretorius in *Bride*—is to give the entirety of Whale's career a more meticulous look. "James Whale, to his lasting misfortune, is pigeonholed as a specialist in the horror film, albeit its most respected practitioner," writes Curtis. "His work in other genres (which accounts for 80 percent of his output) has been relegated mostly to obscurity. His films have been so widely imitated that few realize the modern horror film began with James Whale, and the best of today's films carry the sensibilities that he alone established" (2).

Indeed, Whale was quite inventive and influential. His often brief features (the Frankenstein movies and *The Invisible Man* each clocked in at 75 minutes or less) proved that pictures could be funny, thoughtful, and frightening all at once. He turned monster pictures into bankable fare; 15 million people saw *Frankenstein* in 1931-32, and the film grossed roughly $5 million. He made a huge star of Karloff, an actor for whom he carefully choreographed the Frankenstein monster's arm movements and cumbersome gait. And his unhappiness with Jean Harlow's performance as Helen in the Howard Hughes-directed *Hell's Angels* (1930)—Whale staged the film's dialogue sequences—had a profound effect on the actress's career: "[I]t was James Whale's dislike of Jean Harlow that helped shape the character of Helen and, in doing so, set the pattern of crudely appealing women Harlow would play for the rest of her brief life" (89).

Whale was one of the first English directors to make a successful showing in Hollywood, after spending his formative working years acting in and directing a series of British theater productions. His love of the stage was such that while held captive by the Germans during World War I—he had joined the service in 1915, serving as a lieutenant for an infantry regiment based in Worcestershire—Whale staged plays for the other British soldiers in captivity at Holzminden, Germany. Whale, Curtis writes, "could design and paint scenery, act, and participate in the writing of original material. This was, he later said, his introduction to stagecraft, and it was at Holzminden, in the heart of enemy territory, that the drama began to gain its hold on him" (23).

After a short, but successful, term directing for the New York stage, Whale signed on as a dialogue director for Paramount in the spring of 1929. He directed a pair of relatively small pictures in the early '30s before being tapped for *Frankenstein*. The film, Curtis writes, "was a hit from the first day of release" (155). Reviews heralded Whale as an original new filmmaker, and ticket sales were brisk; one movie house in Times Square did more than $50,000 on the film in a single week—"a remarkable figure for a mid-sized theater," notes Curtis.

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for example, he offers a small but edifying bit of background for the success of Frankenstein: "Through the bleakest days of the Great Depression, people went to the movies. In 1930, a year when more than 1,300 banks closed and 26,000 businesses failed, the film industry averaged 90 million paid admissions a week. Wall Street pundits were prompted to label the film industry 'depression proof,' a distinction that it shared for a time with radio manufacturers and the makers of condoms" (168).

And the off-camera tidbits about the big stars who worked or crossed paths with Whale are endlessly entertaining. Rains, the titular "Invisible Man," clashed with Whale over how to play the role; when the actor told the director that he'd like to be more expressive with his eyes, Whale is said to have replied, "But Claude, old fellow, what are you going to do it with? You haven't any face" (207). Thesiger, a flamboyant gay man who would work on needlepoint when not on camera, referred to himself as "the stitchin' bitch" (240). Because his makeup took four hours a day to apply—and another two to remove—Karloff had to arrive on the *Frankenstein* set at 4 a.m.; the clunky, platform boots he wore while in costume weighed 11 pounds each.

Whale's career peaked with *Bride* in 1935; he was still only in his mid-forties, and couldn't have known it at the time, after the thrilling critical and commercial success of a sequel he initially resisted making, his finest hours were already behind him. Ten films would follow *Bride,* writes Curtis, but "never again would he achieve such a perfect harmony of inspiration and control, nor would he ever again make another film more highly esteemed or more frequently revived" (252).

Correctly, Curtis is most concerned with Whale's films. When he writes about the director's personal life he does so with respect. Long before the gay rights movement, Whale did not try hard to hide his sexual preference; he was briefly engaged to an artist while in his 30s, but later maintained a longtime relationship with the producer David Lewis, never seeking to foster the impression that he was heterosexual. Curtis smartly rejects the dubious notion that Whale's Frankenstein monster, cast out by a heartless world, was in any way emblematic of the homosexual experience.

Whale's final days, the subject of Christopher Bram's 1995 novel, *The Father of Frankenstein,* and a 1998 film based on that book—Bill Condon's fine *Gods and Monsters*—were something less than glorious. By the early 1940s, Curtis notes, Whale's life in Pacific Palisades, California, was "governed largely by meals" (346). Something of an artist in his youth, he began painting again, filling the house with pictures that "ranged from still lifes of the Dutch school to Expressionism and portraiture" (347).

Whale took his own life in 1957, but still casts a lengthy shadow over American popular culture. His influence can be seen on half a century's worth of monster and horror movies. Just last fall (October 2004), a pair of cable networks were offering competing made-for-TV remakes of *Frankenstein*—further evidence that James Whale truly created a monster.

Kevin Canfield is a writer in New York. His work has appeared in the *New York Times, Poets & Writers* magazine, and many other publications.

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Mike Connolly and the Manly Art of Hollywood Gossip

By Hal Volley. New York: McFarland and Company, 2003. $32.00.

"Mike was your average drunk Irish Catholic queen who was pretty venomous when in his cups and good company outside them." That's how Gore Vidal sums up the *Hollywood Reporter* columnist who, from 1949 to 1966, held sway over the entertainment industry with a power often in excess of his infinitely better-known fellow scribes Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. And that's part of the reason why Val Holley's terse, fact-packed, and surprisingly intense biography is so welcome. The quote Holley won from Vidal would be descriptive of any number of gay men in the years before the Stonewall uprising reconfigured American social life. But the fact that a man like Connolly held such power at the particular moment he did is more than of passing interest—and not just to "gay studies"—or even film history. For Connolly is in some ways almost as pivotal a figure as Roy Cohn.

Anyone who has read anything about Hollywood gossip has surely stumbled over Connolly's name—generally right after that of such pretenders to the Hedda/Louella throne as Sidney Skolsky and Sheila Graham. He figures frequently in Ezra Goodman's invaluable *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (Simon & Schuster, 1961). But because he wrote for "the trades," Connolly's "Rambling Reporter" column escaped notice from the larger world of entertainment journalism—even though he helped to shape it in many different ways.

Holley became interested in Connolly because of research he was doing on James Dean. He discovered that the brief but never-to-be-forgotten Dean era, 1954-55, "coincided with the heights of Connolly's powers as a columnist for film industry sophisticates." A "trade paper" columnist a "sophisticate"? "For those who knew how to read between the lines," Holley emphasizes. And such a reading would go beyond Connolly's cheerily chatty style (e.g., "Joe Mankiewicz tiffed with Monty Clift, quarreled with Kate Hepburn, Kate berated Liz Taylor and Liz lashed out at Sam Spiegel") to note the attention he was paying to such gay icons as Tallulah Bankhead (for whom Connolly threw a memorable Hollywood party), and even extend to his mentioning the campy names of Fire Island summer cottages. But generally this was reserved for early in the week: "If it's Tuesday it must be gay." The rest of the time Connolly was a lot more serious-minded, particularly when it came to politics, as he was "the most stridently anti-Communist voice in the Hollywood press."

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And the off-camera tidbits about the big stars who worked or crossed paths with Whale are endlessly entertaining. Rains, the titular "Invisible Man," clashed with Whale over how to play the role; when the actor told the director that he'd like to be more expressive with his eyes, Whale is said to have replied, "But Claude, old fellow, what are you going to do it with? You haven't any face" (207). Thesiger, a flamboyant gay man who would work on needlepoint when not on camera, referred to himself as "the stitchin' bitch" (240). Because his makeup took four hours a day to apply—and another two to remove—Karloff had to arrive on the *Frankenstein* set at 4 a.m.; the clunky, platform boots he wore while in costume weighed 11 pounds each.

Whale's career peaked with *Bride* in 1935; he was still only in his mid-forties, and couldn't have known it at the time, after the thrilling critical and commercial success of a sequel he initially resisted making, his finest hours were already behind him. Ten films would follow *Bride,* writes Curtis, but "never again would he achieve such a perfect harmony of inspiration and control, nor would he ever again make another film more highly esteemed or more frequently revived" (252).

Correctly, Curtis is most concerned with Whale's films. When he writes about the director's personal life he does so with respect. Long before the gay rights movement, Whale did not try hard to hide his sexual preference; he was briefly engaged to an artist while in his 30s, but later maintained a longtime relationship with the producer David Lewis, never seeking to foster the impression that he was heterosexual. Curtis smartly rejects the dubious notion that Whale's Frankenstein monster, cast out by a heartless world, was in any way emblematic of the homosexual experience.

Whale's final days, the subject of Christopher Bram's 1995 novel, *The Father of Frankenstein,* and a 1998 film based on that book—Bill Condon's fine *Gods and Monsters*—were something less than glorious. By the early 1940s, Curtis notes, Whale's life in Pacific Palisades, California, was "governed largely by meals" (346). Something of an artist in his youth, he began painting again, filling the house with pictures that "ranged from still lifes of the Dutch school to Expressionism and portraiture" (347).

Whale took his own life in 1957, but still casts a lengthy shadow over American popular culture. His influence can be seen on half a century's worth of monster and horror movies. Just last fall (October 2004), a pair of cable networks were offering competing made-for-TV remakes of *Frankenstein*—further evidence that James Whale truly created a monster.

Kevin Canfield is a writer in New York. His work has appeared in the *New York Times, Poets & Writers* magazine, and many other publications.

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Mike Connolly and the Manly Art of Hollywood Gossip

By Hal Volley. New York: McFarland and Company, 2003. $32.00.

"Mike was your average drunk Irish Catholic queen who was pretty venomous when in his cups and good company outside them." That's how Gore Vidal sums up the *Hollywood Reporter* columnist who, from 1949 to 1966, held sway over the entertainment industry with a power often in excess of his infinitely better-known fellow scribes Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. And that's part of the reason why Val Holley's terse, fact-packed, and surprisingly intense biography is so welcome. The quote Holley won from Vidal would be descriptive of any number of gay men in the years before the Stonewall uprising reconfigured American social life. But the fact that a man like Connolly held such power at the particular moment he did is more than of passing interest—and not just to "gay studies"—or even film history. For Connolly is in some ways almost as pivotal a figure as Roy Cohn.

Anyone who has read anything about Hollywood gossip has surely stumbled over Connolly's name—generally right after that of such pretenders to the Hedda/Louella throne as Sidney Skolsky and Sheila Graham. He figures frequently in Ezra Goodman's invaluable *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (Simon & Schuster, 1961). But because he wrote for "the trades," Connolly's "Rambling Reporter" column escaped notice from the larger world of entertainment journalism—even though he helped to shape it in many different ways.

Holley became interested in Connolly because of research he was doing on James Dean. He discovered that the brief but never-to-be-forgotten Dean era, 1954-55, "coincided with the heights of Connolly's powers as a columnist for film industry sophisticates." A "trade paper" columnist a "sophisticate"? "For those who knew how to read between the lines," Holley emphasizes. And such a reading would go beyond Connolly's cheerily chatty style (e.g., "Joe Mankiewicz tiffed with Monty Clift, quarreled with Kate Hepburn, Kate berated Liz Taylor and Liz lashed out at Sam Spiegel") to note the attention he was paying to such gay icons as Tallulah Bankhead (for whom Connolly threw a memorable Hollywood party), and even extend to his mentioning the campy names of Fire Island summer cottages. But generally this was reserved for early in the week: "If it's Tuesday it must be gay." The rest of the time Connolly was a lot more serious-minded, particularly when it came to politics, as he was "the most stridently anti-Communist voice in the Hollywood press."

Holley's biggest coup in this regard is his revelation that Connolly's March 1952 disclosure of Kazan's secret testimony before HUAC, in which he refused to identify others, led to his loss of an Oscar for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and curtailed a deal he was planning for the production of *Baby Doll*. Thus Kazan's subsequent squealing before HUAC had a direct motivation and wasn't quite the whiplash, "out of nowhere" betrayal many have thought. Not that this information excuses Kazan—far from it. But it underscores Connolly's power.

As might be expected with such a demagogue, Connolly came to abuse the "authority" he'd granted himself, frequently smearing as "Communist" Hollywood citizens of merely liberal opinion. So vociferous was Connolly's "Red-baiting" (it even continued after McCarthy's fall) it took a man as powerful as producer Mike Todd (scarcely a bastion of the left) to stand up to Connolly and call for an end to such destructive shenanigans.

"It is tempting," Holley notes, "to assume that Connolly used anti-Communist propaganda and ribald humor to mask his homosexuality, but that does not square with the relatively open way he lived. His emphasis on these items *was* a survival strategy, however, because he was meeting the expectations of a specialized audience. If he satiated Hollywood with talk of Communists and décolletage, he was then free to fill the remainder of his column with whatever he wanted. Much of what suited him was news of gay stars." But what did this "relatively open way" consist of? In an America where untold millions of gays and lesbians were required to hide their emotional and romantic lives, Hollywood's "Don't Ask—We'll Never Tell" attitude may have seemed idyllic. Indeed Connolly wasn't the only gay writer at the *Hollywood Reporter* during the time of his reign. Nevertheless he seriously considered marrying a woman right around the time that Rock Hudson went through his brief "show marriage" to his gay agent-manager's secretary. Connolly's lover and "leg man," Joseph Zappia, wasn't exactly thrilled about the idea, and it faded. But Connolly's specula power held on, even in the fabled *Confidential* era. As Holley shows, there was considerable controversy as to whether Connolly may have been supplying the scandal rag with items. Connolly denied it, and Holley demonstrates that some circumstances may have been coincidental. For it was a cheeky Connolly quip about Maureen O'Hara that led *Confidential* to pen a story about the actress having an amorous fling in the balcony of Graumann's Chinese Theater. O'Hara, along with a number of others, sued and brought the rag down. Connolly's rhetorical cleverness (slipping the knife in via a joke rather than stating things unambiguously) kept him out of such litigious strife. But that doesn't mean he didn't court trouble, particularly when it came to Frank Sinatra and his "rat pack," of whom Connolly disapproved. Sinatra was, of course, easy game in that he was scarcely the pet of anyone in the fourth estate. "But the most bilious slurs," Holley notes, "were reserved for [Sinatra pal] Peter Lawford. Just what Connolly knew or felt about Lawford to cause such enmity is unknown, although it may have been Irish resentment of the British." Or Lawford's long-rumored bisexuality may have played a part. But whatever it may have been, Connolly's barbs had no effect on Sinatra and his pals, and as the studio era went into eclipse, neither did anything else Connolly had to say.

Connolly died in 1966, coincidentally the year Cary Grant, the quintessential Hollywood star, made his last film, *Walk Don't Run.* Grant knew it was time to make a gracious exit—leaving us all longing for more. As for Connolly, his exit may well have arrived without the intervention of the Grim Reaper. For just two short years later, Stonewall would make it clear that being gay wasn't just to be reserved for Tuesdays.

David Ehrenstein is a frequent contributor to *Film Quarterly.* His books include *Film: The Front Line—1984, The Scorsese Picture,* and *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood 1928-2000.* He is currently working on his memoirs, *Raised by Hand Puppets.*

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New Philosophy for New Media

By Mark B.N. Hansen, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004. $34.95.

In its polemical title, *New Philosophy for New Media* makes a big claim and a big promise. As scholars in both the arts and sciences struggle to develop a vocabulary, methodology, and academic field adequate to respond to the shifting conditions of technological mediation, "the digital" is often constructed as the "newness" that exposes and problematizes "old" ways of thinking. The new way of thinking, however, seems yet to have arrived. In announcing the "new philosophy" we've been waiting for, Mark Hansen not only identifies our unmet expectation; he promises to finally justify it. With *New Philosophy for New Media* he offers a rigorous, original, and provocative theorization of new media that succeeds, at least more than most, in articulating the specificity of this medium and in elaborating the promise of the new.

New Philosophy for New Media further develops the theoretical trajectory of Hansen's first book, *Embodying Technesis,* which considered how poststructuralist philosophy subsumes complex interactions between materiality and embodiment under a logic of inscription. With this second book, Hansen begins to propose an alterative philosophical engagement with embodiment, interpreting contemporary new media artworks through a radical theorization of affect. Following the critical perspective exemplified by Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman,* Hansen explores how contemporary encounters with digital technology re-privilege and extend embodied human capacities rather than displacing the human into "the posthuman." Focusing primarily on interactive installation pieces, the book, at its most basic level, offers a

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valuable resource in its detailed descriptions and color photographs of many new media artworks. More remarkable, however, is the depth and breadth of Hansen's engagement with these projects: he develops his argument through a dazzling interweaving of ideas from philosophy, art history, visual culture, critical theory, cybernetics, and the "hard" sciences. Writing out of an English Literature department, Hansen demonstrates, like Hayles, how the best work in the emerging field of new media often models the productive boundary-crossings it explores.

Hansen bases his "new philosophy" in a return to Henri Bergson's account of the embodied, affective basis of perception. Gilles Deleuze's appropriation of Bergson in his own work on cinema serves as a through-line toward an engagement with contemporary media and an updating of Bergson's theories. Departing from what he considers a misstep in Deleuze's notion of the "affect-image," in which affect is disembodied (counter to Bergson's theory), Hansen elaborates a "digital-image" through which he hopes to reinvest Deleuze's concepts of the machinic and "becoming-other" in the service of a "Bergsonist vocation." Positioning affectivity as the human capacity for opening to and incorporating the new, Hansen argues that the machinic provokes an affective experience which, rather than abandoning or distorting human modes of perception, emphasizes how human being is constitutively mediated through otherness, constructed through an ongoing "heterogenesis." The threat of "becoming-other" is recast, then, as the possibility of "becoming-human" according to a Bergsonist concept of "creative evolution" as the extension of human intelligence and possibility.

Hansen "updates" Bergson in arguing that the body is not a "privileged image" among images but a "proprioceptive interval" among information, a "spacing" that both creates and frames difference. Adopting Bergson's idea of the body as a "center of indeterminacy" that selects images from the "universal flux" of images that is the world, Hansen extends this selection as a kind of creative construction he calls "framing" or "enframing." Traditional visual media, he argues, offer a "technical" frame that delivers the experience of an image, according to the conventions of the particular medium, as an external visual object. Cinema, for example, offers the cinematic image as constitutively enframed by the conventions of the screen. New media projects, however, present "information" that is not already technically framed, placing a more direct emphasis on the affective bodily processes constructing the experience.

While Hansen's notion of framing suggests a very broad relevance as a theory of affect, he uses it to argue the medium-specificity of digital, interactive art. His interest in dissociating these new media artworks from other media, especially cinema, stems from his desire to get beyond the "ocularcentrism" that he claims still dominates art historical and cinematic paradigms. He argues that the cinematic model, and its implicit ocularcentrism, continues to constrain new media, levying this charge against the prominent theorization offered by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media*. Against such accounts, Hansen intends to develop, perhaps echoing Merleau-Ponty more than he acknowledges, a phenomenology of embodied aesthetic experience that would privilege a synaesthetic, proprioceptive, and haptic basis for perception. Hansen chooses not to engage phenomenological accounts of cinema, like that offered byVivian Sobchack in *The Address of the Eye,* which could extend his idea of framing to the affective experience of other types of media. Such a move would support his argument for an aesthetics of affect but, by challenging the medium-specificity of his notion of framing, might undermine the privilege that he affords new media in his account.

Hansen argues that by exposing the affective processes that incorporate experience as meaningful, new media foreground the dynamic by which embodied human being is continually constructed through such acts of incorporation. Even if new media does not represent as special a case as Hansen suggests, the argument he builds around it effectively disrupts not only a dominant ocularcentric model of perception, but also the corresponding model of agency ascribed to the traditional liberal humanist subject. Hansen's theory of affective incorporation enables complex constructions of "posthuman" subjectivity that would address the increasingly penetrating experience of the machinic, while also asserting the coherence, specificity, and responsibility of human agency.

In the stunning last chapter on Bill Viola, Hansen extends his investigation of the aesthetic of new media as a radical philosophical reflection on presence. Using Bernard Stiegler's extension of Derrida, Merleau-Ponty's extension of Husserl, and Gilbert Simondon's extension of Merleau-Ponty, Hansen carefully develops a phenomenological argument for the "technical" mediation and extension of the affective "now." The example of Viola's recent films (such as *Quintet of the Astonished, Observance,* and his *Passions* series), which are shot at an extremely high rate of capture and then projected at a very slow speed, demonstrates, for Hansen, how technical mediation can extend the affective register of the present. Exposing individual temporal and sensory experience to the "preindividual" or "preobjective" context that always constitutes the "background" of self-consciousness, this technical mediation exposes the incompleteness or openness at the heart of subjectivity. For Hansen, this exposure does not unravel the moral or physical integrity of the subject, displacing the human into the posthuman. Rather, it reveals the affective weaving of subjectivity through that which exceeds it as the very process of "becoming human."

Refuting those who would see digital media as inherently adverse to the embodied commitments and ethical investments of the phenomenological tradition, Hansen persuasively demonstrates that new media artworks offer valuable sites for renewed critical investigation and dis covery. The range, originality, and brilliance of *New Philosophy for New Media* establish it, and Mark Hansen, as raising the standard and setting the direction for interdisci-

plinary media scholarship. At the forefront of current debates, this book will undoubtedly center important work to follow.

In opening a dialogue, however, Hansen's ideas take risks that qualify any assumption of a fully formed "new philosophy." His notion of framing, as it would ground the specificity of new media, seems threatened by its own expansiveness, especially as he considers Bill Viola's films according to a theory he has developed in opposition to the cinematic. His provocative theory of affect, forced to encompass so much, also seems to suffer from its range; it may not effectively stand against the totalization it would resist if, as a "bodily" meta-faculty, it replaces vision, intelligence, or imagination with an equally imperious monism. Hansen's use of scientific arguments and rhetoric broach this tendency, as favored words such as "catalyze" sometimes threaten to naturalize his claims or to suggest that the embodied processes he describes follow a laboratory logic.

There could be a problematic new humanism lurking in the posthumanism Hansen describes. If a correlation of otherness with the "technical" lends technology the ethical status of "the other," it might provoke the uncritical of "technogenesis" as an ethical imperative. Such a simplification could suggest that a technologically enabled "evolution" of the human would be—and already is—automatically an ethical achievement.

Brooke Belisle is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the Department of Rhetoric at University of California, Berkeley.

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Revolution!

The Explosion of World Cinema in the Sixties

By Peter Cowie. London: Faber & Faber, 2004. $25.00 cloth; $14.00 paper.

Reading Peter Cowie's very good and nicely illustrated book on 1960s cinema, you are reminded of Peter Biskind's *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. Both take as their inspiration that efflorescence of experiment that occurred in the wake of the French New Wave. Both build their accounts around extensive interviews with the historical protagonists. Both progress from anticipation to delirium to disillusionment.

If ever an era had a Zeitgeist, it was the 1960s. There was definitely something in the air. If a generational complaint over the apathy accompanying postwar consumerism animated young French men and women, misgivings about their parents stirred Czechs, Germans, Americans, Britons, and Japanese to rebel. If the development of lightweight cameras and sound equipment made cinema vérité a possibility in the 1950s, by 1963 the Kennedy assassination made it a matter of public record. And in 1968 Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* combined the public record with arthouse kudos. As Cowie writes: "the very crudeness of the technique gives birth to a new dimension of realism." If the British New Wave emerged out of an initiative that simultaneously bankrolled new directors and launched the Bond franchise, the establishment of the Swedish Film Institute in 1963 and the American Film Institute in 1967 made the public sponsorship of art cinema a universal principle. Viewed with awe, nostalgia, and regret by Cowie's interviewees, the '60s were a special time during which the interface between experience and the moving image was rewritten.

In 1963 Cowie launched the *International Film Guide,* an invaluable resource and an essential symptom of the cinephilic Zeitgeist. An assiduous commentator on world art cinema for 40 years, he was one of a generation for whom what was on screen and what was going on were of equal importance. As these testimonies make clear, the cinema was as fundamental as history itself, a matter of breathing. And Cowie was there. "I saw *The Leopard* in 'Scope on an outdoor screen in Locarno during the festival there in the summer of 1963. I had to drive over the Gotthard Pass that night but the sumptuous grandeur of Visconti's compositions, allied to a conversation at dinner with Lotte Eisner, somehow kept me alert enough to survive the journey."

Cowie's book comes to a head when, out of solidarity with the Parisian barricades, the Cannes Film Festival closed down in May '68. Cowie never gets over an air of pent-up rancor followed by bittersweet reflection. Of 1959, that annus mirabilis that saw Antonioni, Cassavetes, Reisz, and Godard change the world, Godard wrote, "It was a good time to be alive. And the fame that lay ahead had not yet begun to weave the shroud of our happiness." The overlap of history and film history feels almost tangible at Cowie's Cannes, amid rumors of banks closing out of caution and Provençal peasants wielding scythes at traffic on the Cannes-Nice autoroute.

Since McLuhan, we have taken the "Global Village" idea for granted, the instant email making it seem more real every day. It is still difficult, however, to separate the truth from the rhetoric in Bertolucci's contention that events at Berkeley, Chicago, and Columbia were triggered by the violence attending the dismissal of Henri Langlois from the Cinémathèque Française in February 1968. But, like Biskind, Cowie makes it *seem* true by quickening the realization that, to paraphrase Lenin, the cinema was the most important thing they had. Between 1959 and 1968, the cinema was their heritage, the fount of their ethics. That they eventually gave it back to the moneymen is ominously foreshadowed by an exchange overheard in a Cannes bar: "Is this a revolution?" asked an excited British distributor as scuffles broke out at the Palais des Festivals, to which Hungarian-born George Hoellering, proprietor of London's Academy Cinemas, replied: "This is not a revolution. I have been in revolutions."

As Cowie's communicants go misty-eyed over memories of seldom revived titles, such as Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels* (1961) and Anthony Simmons' *Four in the Morning* (1964), the preciousness of this history

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is borne in on us. DVD and video enable us to "own" a movie, it is true. But the breathtaking charge of witnessing change as it occurs before their eyes will die with these people. It is to our grave misfortune that, for all the availability of cinema's heritage, film has never seemed so important as it did then.

Less interested in closely analyzing films, Cowie is very good in this book at charting the historical infrastructures behind the 1960s: the burgeoning arthouses; an adventurous generation of distributors in an era when "arthouse" and "mainstream" were truly distinctive worlds rather than mere marketing variants; the development of the Swiss Nagra tape recorder and the Coutant camera. Volker Schlöndorff offers an evocative account of being 18 in 1958 and going to that repository of the world's celluloid heritage the, Cinémathèque Française. Weaving lives together, Cowie catches the sense in which the filmmaking community was, although a generation wide, still relatively intimate, making Jonathan Rosenbaum's "Children of 1960," the contributors to his recent *Movie Mutations,* seem a well-meaning coterie by comparison. Screenwriter Franco Solinas worked on both Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and Nicholas Ray's *The Savage Innocents* (1960). He wrote for Pontecorvo, Costa-Gavras, Losey: "The mood of the sixties wafted infectiously across the tulip fields from France and Germany."

However, aside from some terrific actresses, the era does seem rather uninteresting from a woman's point-of-view. Women auteurs were few. Cowie makes the most of Agnès Varda's recollections; her *Pointe Court* (1954) anticipated the French New Wave. But, as ever, the account of the British New Wave seems unduly reverent toward that boys' club. And generally, the book dares not interrogate the masculinism of the Godards and Truffauts. Shirley Clarke is there, but more on the Czech New Wave's Vera Chytilová would have been interesting. Still, we owe Cowie for keeping these voices alive in a time when we know even less about revolutions.

Richard Armstrong is an associate tutor affiliated to the British Film Institute. His book *Understanding Realism* appears from BFI publishing in 2005.

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Savage Junctures

Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking

By Anne Nesbet. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003. $65.00 cloth.

The French cultural theorist Roland Barthes once wrote of Sergei Eisenstein's art that "it chooses the meaning, imposes it, hammers it home," and of Eisensteinian meaning that it "devastates ambiguity." Indeed, he claimed that only by halting the image track and examining certain stills could he detect anything in excess of explicit signification. *Savage Junctures* challenges the commonly accepted notion that Eisenstein's films produce such tidy meanings. It is, paradoxically, the deconstructive close analysis Barthes performs in *S/Z,* where he exults in the accumulation of meanings and the concurrent breaking down of differences between terms, that most precisely defines the spirit of Eisenstein's work as Nesbet sees it. Her meditation on Eisenstein boldly asserts that Eisenstein is fully modernist, not only, as always acknowledged, in medium, thematics, and montage techniques, but, counter-intuitively, in the diffusion, even abrogation, of meaning. While it is well known, for instance, that two years after Eisenstein's death, André Bazin came under fire in France for comparing the filmic portrayals of Stalin to Tarzan, Nesbet demonstrates how Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* sets in motion a slippery chain of signification that connects the deadly Soviet dictator to the murderous Russian tsar and, through the contortions of the tsar's portrayer, Nikolai Cherkassov, to Mickey Mouse.

Nesbet insists on the "messiness" and "indecorousness" of Eisenstein's thought, which, she argues, emerges out of his refusal to lose sight of the specificity of the individual object, or image. In highlighting Eisenstein's attention to the particular, Nesbet sets her work apart from other scholarly attempts to describe Eisenstein's theory and practice. Chief among these is David Bordwell's *The Cinema of Eisenstein*. Nesbet turns his "gentle skepticism" toward the coherence of Eisenstein's film-philosophy on its head, writing, "[T]he very collision between specific image and general rule that would seem to disqualify Eisenstein as a philosopher in fact does the opposite. To borrow Bordwell's language, I would argue that it is in its very 'defects' that Eisenstein's image-based thinking becomes most challenging and most productive." This stance also leads to a respectful critique of Viacheslav Ivanov's Aesopian (because of censorship) introduction to Eisenstein's archives, *Notes on the History of Semiotics in the USSR,* which, according to Nesbet, "minimizes the messiness of Eisenstein's thought," and to a similar critique of Mikhail Yampolsky's *The Memory of Tireisias,* which, for Nesbet, too swiftly imposes pattern on Eisenstein's unruly archaeology. Instead, Nesbet picks up on the "excess" Kristin Thompson discovers in her neo-formalist analysis of *Ivan the Terrible,* and makes the case that this excess exists not only in *Ivan the Terrible,* but in every film Eisenstein ever made.

To make this case, Nesbet first locates Eisenstein, with erudition and originality, in relation to both intellectual and aesthetic history. In particular, she focuses on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* which plays on the tension between "image" (*Bild*) and "concept" (*Begriff*). For Nesbet, this tension between the singularity of the image and the generality of thought structures Eisenstein's thinking in images. Indeed, the "savage juncture" of the title is the eruption of a "primitive" image-based thinking into modern conceptual thought, which results in the complication and enrichment of Eisenstein's film theory and practice. This collision between image-based and conceptual thought characterizes not only Eisenstein's later writings, as Bordwell suggests,

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but is pronounced, as Nesbet demonstrates, even in Eisenstein's earliest film theory and practice. Nesbet embarks on a close reading of Eisenstein's films that is at once highly attentive and creative. Her examination of his films and written texts follows a biographical, or chronological order, but *Savage Junctures,* with its closely argued, radical reconsideration of Eisenstein as a thinker, does not belong to the genre of critical biography. And while archival research clearly powers the argument, if the book does address the film spectator, it does so mainly from the perspective of Eisenstein's theory and practice: this is not a reception study. Though an examination of a single filmmaker/theorist, it is a hybrid of film theory and history in its own right.

The book's seven chapters focus primarily on the completed feature-length films: *Strike, Battleship Potemkin, October, The General Line,* and *Ivan the Terrible*. (The making of the uncompleted *Que viva Mexico*! receives more attention than *Alexander Nevsky,* and the destroyed *Bezhin Meadow* also finds a place in the discussion.) Each of the seven chapters delineates and examines a realization of the tension between image and concept, or singular and general at a given stage in Eisenstein's film theory and practice. Sometimes this delineation and examination extend beyond Eisenstein to characterize a broader aesthetic (and political) context, as in the brilliant first chapter, "Beyond Recognition: *Strike* and the Eye of the Abattoir," which contains a hugely important gloss on the role of violence in Shklovsky's concept of modernist defamiliarization, or "making strange." Continuing this theme of a violent, or savage, aesthetics, Nesbet observes that for Eisenstein, history and film are both "fundamentally indebted to relentless editorial blades: guillotine; scissors" (Eisenstein, as she points out, was obsessed with the guillotine). In Chapter Three, "Picture Thinking: *October* and the Debris of Philosophy," she nails her claim that Eisenstein's insistence on the importance of these "editorial blades" results in a "relentless" or perpetual delinking of image and concept. Here is her astute reading of the gods sequence in *October*:

> Whereas idea and image are completely synonymous in the first Baroque image, they grow further apart with each subsequent image. We retain the description "God" and show idols that in no way correspond with our own image of this concept. . . . As Eisenstein unlinks Bild from Begriff, he would seem to be deconstructing the very idea of intellectual montage, all hope of getting images to communicate particular concepts in a consciously controllable manner. If image and concept are fundamentally slippery, no longer held in any kind of tight correspondence, then perhaps we should see the "Gods" sequence not as evidence that Capital the Movie is possible (as Noël Carroll does), but as a warning that most likely such a project will prove impossible.

The above passage should have an impact that extends beyond Eisenstein scholarship to broader questions concerning signification in the cinema.

If, in the gods sequence, the singularity of each image not only discredits, but also dismantles the concept that unites the series; if, in other words, the particular threatens the survival of the general, the reverse happens in Eisenstein's conception of pathos. Drawing on Eisenstein's essay *Nonindifferent Nature* and the film *Alexander Nevsky,* Nesbet describes this pathos as "a leap into a new quality," and as an example she gives the "leap the Soviet hero was asked to take when he faced death with heroism and nonchalance, both nothing and something at the same time." She continues, "[T]he horizon line marking the intersection between the individual and history—the individual and the collective—was also the line of pathos, by means of which man and landscape intersected each other, nature becoming more animate (less indifferent) and man becoming less different from, say, a rock, a tree, or . . . a vast frozen lake. The Big Sky beckoning to the viewer is an invitation into the collective and into death."

As Nesbet herself suggests, there is a slippage between the singularity of the image, always in excess of the concept, and the singularity of the individual, who, it seems, must be mutilated to fit into the sequences both of montage and of history. But if Eisenstein recognizes and even gives rein to the unruly signifying power of the individual image, he is much more stringent with the individual character. Indeed, on the level of characterization, it would be difficult to argue that Eisenstein the thinker allowed the individual to trump the collective, or the particular to disrupt the general. This is fine so long as aesthetic representation does not intersect with political representation and so long as the photographic images of living actors on screen do not imply persons. Otherwise, the negotiation of the relationship between individual and collective would have to be far more finely tuned and, even so, would have to allow for an inevitable margin of error. Nesbet's reevaluation of Eisenstein's oeuvre certainly complicates received critical opinion, but it also begs the question as to why a director aiming for a cinema that would battle social inequality and powerlessness was far more willing to grant specificity to an image than to a person.

Savage Junctures manifests an adventurous and generous spirit of intellectual inquiry, which may well inspire readers to build on the originality of its insights. Nesbet's style is lucid and engaging. This book is a must-read not only for scholars who focus on Eisenstein, montage, or early Soviet cinema, but for those interested in the broader questions of modernism, philosophy, and film.

Karla Oeler is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at Emory University, and is completing a book called *A Grammar of Murder: Violence and Cinematic Form.*

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Straight

Constructions of Heterosexuality in the Cinema

By Wheeler Winston Dixon. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003. $65.50 cloth; $21.95 paper.

The systemic exploration of sexuality over the past two decades has proven valuable for critical understandings of identity. Disciplines such as "queer theory" have devoted much time and energy to investigating "normative" elements of culture, contemplating the manner in which particular identities become institutionally naturalized while others are castigated and stigmatized. As these critiques have progressed, attention has increasingly shifted toward the examination of those cultural forms traditionally associated with the performance of "heterosexuality." Just as "whiteness" has emerged as a significant concept in studies of race, and "masculinity" has come to occupy an important place in analyses of gender, the study of heterosexuality as a discursive structure has been widely embraced.

In *Straight: Constructions of Heterosexuality in the Cinema,* Wheeler Winston Dixon joins this conversation by considering how seemingly disparate elements of culture converge on screen to commodify, and ultimately reify, idealized images of heterosexuality. Investigating the materialization of specific forms of sexuality, the author suggests that cinema aids and abides in the construction of normative sexual identities experienced in everyday life. He argues that cinematic performances of straightness entail "rigid self-discipline," creating "a state of monotony, repetition, and predictability." Films produce and reproduce this certainty, offering ubiquitous blueprints for appropriate and inappropriate ways of living. This has profound implications for those who do not, or cannot, subscribe to an elusive cultural mandate that glorifies visions of a "heterotopia." Dixon aligns himself with activists and scholars who question "the overriding concept of heteroperformativity in the mainstream cinema, those who, as actors, writers, or directors, have created visions of the heterotopic dream as imperfect." Ultimately, the author hopes to create a space in which compulsive heterosexuality can be resisted.

Dixon convincingly draws attention to the complex relationship between economic impulses, audience segments, and the cultural ideals that reinscribe subtle social prejudices. *Straight*'s focus on the association between heterosexuality and consumerism is especially intriguing, illuminating how all minorities are potentially influenced by the normative demands of studio marketing expectations. While never attempting to forge complete parallels among differing populations, he nevertheless makes creative connections between the normalization processes that excluded such groups as women directors during film's silent era and the marginalization felt by contemporary filmmakers focusing on issues of sexuality.

Dixon's text is well written and is at its best when probing offbeat texts and largely unknown personalities in cinematic memory. The details he provides about writers such as Jim Thompson, who composed two screenplays for Stanley Kubrick (*The Killing, Paths of Glory*) and had a number of his novels adapted for the cinema (*The Grifters, The Kill-Off*), are unique and fascinating, making *Straight* an enjoyable and illuminating read. Rather than attempt to document a history of heterosexuality in film (which would no doubt be immense, if not impossible), Dixon focuses on specific moments, filling in specific gaps of film history, but also creating ruptures in traditional understandings of heterosexual discourse. Fans of cinema history will greatly enjoy his recounts of Thomas Edison, the British *Carry On* films that spanned five decades, and his invaluable interviews with Robert Downey, Sr., and the young, up-and-coming film director Jamie Babbit.

Enthusiasts of GLBT studies and queer theory will be especially pleased with Dixon's critique of gender-bending films such as *Homicidal,* the 1961 production featuring a cross-dressing murderer. When *Homicidal* was released, the gender-bending star, Joan Marshall, who played both Warren and Emily, agreed to sign onto the film if she could adopt a false stage persona, that of Jean Arless. This adoption of a false identity was regarded as a necessity by some after stars such as Anthony Perkins were unable to break free of their onscreen roles as cross-dressing killers. These deleterious associations are scrutinized in *Straight* to underscore the longstanding tradition Hollywood has held of encouraging people to uphold normative behavior and the value of being "straight."

Straight will spark numerous discussions about heterosexuality as a performative construct in the cinema. Dixon's work forces readers to ponder how particular media texts are marked as "straight" and the limits of such conceptualizations. Such questions are especially significant for aficionados of media and GLBT studies who read identity and cultural texts as fluid and varied. Dixon, for example, argues that television programs such as *Laverne and Shirley, The Love Boat,* and *Fantasy Island* are "heterosexually based" sitcoms that perpetuate an idealized understanding of the domestic sphere. But the degree to which these shows perpetuate normativity and traditional heterosexual values continues to instigate much debate. *Straight* forges an important dialogue with texts such as Alexander Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer,* which examines the cultural appropriation of shows such as *Laverne and Shirley* in gay and lesbian communities, and offers an interesting starting point for navigating the blurry line between negotiated identities and consumer politics.

The manner in which central concepts such as "performativity" and "heteronormative" are understood in the text will also engender timely discussions. For readers attuned to the study of sexuality, delimiting the notion of "performance" can be tricky in *Straight*. While Dixon argues that Jamie Babbit's independent film *But I'm a Cheerleader* is a "cheerful alternative to the dominant heterocentric cinema," there are potential dangers in positioning such a film as marginal. Certainly *But I'm a Cheerleader* is a fun and interesting production. However, in many ways the film

works against performative understandings of sexuality. Babbit's work leaves little room for sexual ambiguity, always clearly defining those who are "homosexual" from those considered "heterosexual." Rather than stand in opposition to "heterosexual" films, such independent productions often reproduce the very logic examined in Dixon's work. Because independent features necessitate an audience that will support distribution, they usually succumb to the reification of "homosexual" for the very marketing purposes that Dixon seemingly wishes to resist. While independent cinema is certainly more creative with its use of sexuality and gender, it nevertheless tends to find solace in stable categories that undermine the possibilities lurking in performative theories of identity.

These points are not to undermine the fine cultural and political work accomplished in Dixon's text. Examining discourses that stigmatize an entire class of citizens, while reifying the myth of normalized heterosexuality at their expense, is an important project that increasingly necessitates attention. *Straight* offers readers an occasion to read the exploits of a mythic heterotopia and resist the damaging behavior such ideological forms provoke. His study is a fine addition to a burgeoning and significant conversation.

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Allen, Richard, and Malcolm Turvey, eds. *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*. Film Culture in Transition Series. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002. $27.50. Annette Michelson was the co-founder, with Rosalind Krauss (who contributes a short preface here), of the journal *October,* and she is one of the most influential scholars in film studies as we know it in the U.S., alongside the likes of P. Adams Sitney, Bertrand Augst, and David Bordwell. An art critic of minimalism who gradually moved to film criticism, Michelson has written books on Vertov, Oshima, and Warhol, and translated texts by Sartre, Bataille, and Leroi-Gourhan: her critical oeuvre spans the whole field of what "visual studies" now encompasses. Accordingly, essays in this collection cover large vistas of film studies. Its title echoes that of a 1973 article by Michelson that winks at Barthes's *Camera Lucida,* and probably also at Sarah Kofman's *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* (1973).

Edward Dimendberg, Noël Carroll, and Stuart Liebman contribute incisive essays on well-known theorists such as Eisenstein, Moholy-Nagy, and Jean Epstein—the latter having been introduced to American scholarship in large part due to Michelson and her students Liebman and Turvey. This volume also reflects Michelson's ties to France, where she lived for 15 years, in the essays by Allen S. Weiss titled "Narcissistic Machines and Erotic Prostheses" on French texts by Vernes, Villiers, and Schwob; and by Tom Gunning on Loïe Fuller, electricity, and early French cinema. This machinic theme—one "dominant" in the collection—links to other essays in the volume by Noa Steimatsky, on Antonioni's early interest in aerial landscape photography, and by William G. Simon, on the nuclear apparatus in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. But textual analysis might be seen as the co-dominant theme, since Dimendberg and Liebman examine para-theoretical texts of Epstein (*The Cinema Seen from Etna* [1926]) and Moholy-Nagy ("Dynamic of a Metropolis"). Perhaps only Richard Allen's original essay on Hitchcock's suspense qualifies as traditional film criticism.

Other essays explore intersections of cinema with disciplines such as intellectual history (Michael Iampolski), or architecture and geography (Guiliana Bruno). More personal theoretical ruminations include Peter Wollen's, on 30-year-long efforts at pinning down what experimental film might possibly be, and Babette Mangolte's, on the digital transmogrification that awaits cinema in the short or long run. What makes this interdisciplinary collection dialogical is that each essay connects to some aspect of Michelson's wide-ranging interests and publications: Malcolm Turvey had the unenviable task of trying to map them out in the introduction. A detailed bibliography of Michelson lets readers follow up whatever strands the essays may have limned out—whether on montage, *The New Eve,* Duchamp, the fate of the Left, or filmmakers Snow, Deren, and Frampton. The editors might be taken to task for failing to mention that this 2003 collection borrows parts of a book (Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion* [2002]) and even a whole chapter (from Weiss's *Breathless* [2002]) that appeared beforehand. But readers unfamiliar with these contributions will have two more essays to discover in this *Festschrift* to Annette Michelson, which gathers many of the finest scholars working in film studies today.

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works against performative understandings of sexuality. Babbit's work leaves little room for sexual ambiguity, always clearly defining those who are "homosexual" from those considered "heterosexual." Rather than stand in opposition to "heterosexual" films, such independent productions often reproduce the very logic examined in Dixon's work. Because independent features necessitate an audience that will support distribution, they usually succumb to the reification of "homosexual" for the very marketing purposes that Dixon seemingly wishes to resist. While independent cinema is certainly more creative with its use of sexuality and gender, it nevertheless tends to find solace in stable categories that undermine the possibilities lurking in performative theories of identity.

These points are not to undermine the fine cultural and political work accomplished in Dixon's text. Examining discourses that stigmatize an entire class of citizens, while reifying the myth of normalized heterosexuality at their expense, is an important project that increasingly necessitates attention. *Straight* offers readers an occasion to read the exploits of a mythic heterotopia and resist the damaging behavior such ideological forms provoke. His study is a fine addition to a burgeoning and significant conversation.

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Book Notes

Contributors: **Vincent LoBrutto** is an instructor of editing, production design, and cinema studies for the Department of Film, Video, and Animation at the School of Visual Arts, New York. **Mike Mashon** is Curator of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division at the Library of Congress. **Greg Taylor** is Associate Professor of Film in the Conservatory of Theatre Arts and Film at Purchase College, SUNY, and the author of *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism*. **Christophe Wall-Romana** is an assistant professor in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Minnesota.

Allen, Richard, and Malcolm Turvey, eds. *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*. Film Culture in Transition Series. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002. $27.50. Annette Michelson was the co-founder, with Rosalind Krauss (who contributes a short preface here), of the journal *October,* and she is one of the most influential scholars in film studies as we know it in the U.S., alongside the likes of P. Adams Sitney, Bertrand Augst, and David Bordwell. An art critic of minimalism who gradually moved to film criticism, Michelson has written books on Vertov, Oshima, and Warhol, and translated texts by Sartre, Bataille, and Leroi-Gourhan: her critical oeuvre spans the whole field of what "visual studies" now encompasses. Accordingly, essays in this collection cover large vistas of film studies. Its title echoes that of a 1973 article by Michelson that winks at Barthes's *Camera Lucida,* and probably also at Sarah Kofman's *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* (1973).

Edward Dimendberg, Noël Carroll, and Stuart Liebman contribute incisive essays on well-known theorists such as Eisenstein, Moholy-Nagy, and Jean Epstein—the latter having been introduced to American scholarship in large part due to Michelson and her students Liebman and Turvey. This volume also reflects Michelson's ties to France, where she lived for 15 years, in the essays by Allen S. Weiss titled "Narcissistic Machines and Erotic Prostheses" on French texts by Vernes, Villiers, and Schwob; and by Tom Gunning on Loïe Fuller, electricity, and early French cinema. This machinic theme—one "dominant" in the collection—links to other essays in the volume by Noa Steimatsky, on Antonioni's early interest in aerial landscape photography, and by William G. Simon, on the nuclear apparatus in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. But textual analysis might be seen as the co-dominant theme, since Dimendberg and Liebman examine para-theoretical texts of Epstein (*The Cinema Seen from Etna* [1926]) and Moholy-Nagy ("Dynamic of a Metropolis"). Perhaps only Richard Allen's original essay on Hitchcock's suspense qualifies as traditional film criticism.

Other essays explore intersections of cinema with disciplines such as intellectual history (Michael Iampolski), or architecture and geography (Guiliana Bruno). More personal theoretical ruminations include Peter Wollen's, on 30-year-long efforts at pinning down what experimental film might possibly be, and Babette Mangolte's, on the digital transmogrification that awaits cinema in the short or long run. What makes this interdisciplinary collection dialogical is that each essay connects to some aspect of Michelson's wide-ranging interests and publications: Malcolm Turvey had the unenviable task of trying to map them out in the introduction. A detailed bibliography of Michelson lets readers follow up whatever strands the essays may have limned out—whether on montage, *The New Eve,* Duchamp, the fate of the Left, or filmmakers Snow, Deren, and Frampton. The editors might be taken to task for failing to mention that this 2003 collection borrows parts of a book (Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion* [2002]) and even a whole chapter (from Weiss's *Breathless* [2002]) that appeared beforehand. But readers unfamiliar with these contributions will have two more essays to discover in this *Festschrift* to Annette Michelson, which gathers many of the finest scholars working in film studies today.

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pires and *L'Émigré,* accomplish two feats of film history by chronicling the British film industry through the prism of editing and editors, and by creating a comprehensive text on the role and purpose of editing and editors in the worldwide process of making motion pictures.

Twenty-two interviews with film editors of diverse backgrounds and cinema styles were conducted for this project. They include John Bloom (*Georgy Girl, Gandhi, Black Widow*), Jim Clark (*Darling, The Day of the Locust, The Killing Fields*), Anne V. Coates (*Lawrence of Arabia, The Elephant Man, Out of Sight*), Antony Gibbs (*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, Tom Jones, Walkabout*), Tony Lawson (*Barry Lyndon, Two Deaths, The Butcher Boy*), Tom Priestly (*Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment, Marat/ Sade, Deliverance*), Terry Rawlings (*Alien, Chariots of Fire, White of the Eye*), and Lesley Walker (*The Tempest, Mona Lisa, The Fisher King*). But this is not an interview-format book. An intelligent, even-handed, and perceptive narrative is applied to enlighten the reader on this important subject. At judicious moments, Perkins and Stollery allow the film editors to speak so they can amplify a point, submit an insightful anecdote, or provide an example to support and clarify the prose text.

For the legions that know little about postproduction or the editor's contribution to the director's vision, *British Film Editors* will be a revelation, possibly an epiphany, about how motion pictures are actually made. For those with experience in editorial theory or practice there is still much to learn within these pages. The book sets the standard for a new era of scholarship on film editing. The ups and downs of the British film industry are well chronicled, and there is also a cogent explanation for why British film editors have worked in, and, in some cases, relocated to California. Also fascinating is a look at American Studio satellite operations in England and the role American editors played in the British film tradition.

An extremely useful appendix presents thumbnail profiles and filmographies for many of the editors cited in the main text. A glossary of terms is helpful, but could have been expanded even though other terms are presented and expertly defined in the body of the text.

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Posner, Bruce, ed. *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film, 1893-1941.* New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2001. $11.95. Ironically, while interest in making and distributing new avant-garde films continues to dwindle, the updating, reissue, and introduction of books on the historical American avant-garde seems to be on an upswing. This is a generally fascinating volume of well-chosen essays that manages to be genuinely provocative while greatly enriching our understanding and appreciation of a body of work that is particularly neglected and marginalized within an already marginalized mode of filmmaking.

Interestingly, *Unseen Cinema*'s provocations stem not from any outrages contained in the films, but from the very corpus under consideration. For in extending the efforts of Jan-Christopher Horak (*Lovers of Cinema,* 1995) to broaden awareness of American avant-garde work produced prior to Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon,* this book risks sullying sacred ground, while in the process seeming weirdly nostalgic for a pre-Visionary alternative American cinema. Heralding the efforts of self-styled "amateurs" who also frequently worked in other media and/or other modes of production (e.g. Hollywood studios), and in styles which might now seem embarrassingly dated or Europhilic, the collection seems to aim not simply at unearthing a heretofore hidden prehistory of a movement whose rather loaded ideals and narrative we have long taken as given, but to call for a return to a notion of cinematic avant-gardism as visual transcendence—as (in editor Bruce Posner's words) a "pure visual energy" borne of a spirit of creativity "that aligns film with painting, sculpture, or any of the other fine art practices." Even the terms of aesthetic defense here can seem vaguely anachronistic: in noting that these films eschew European polish for a "raw, direct quality that flaunts its own set of in-your-face, here-it-is, like-it-or-not American sensibilities," Posner strongly echoes a number of similar claims for American modernism (by Sheldon Cheney, Sam Kootz, and others) made back in the 1930s and 1940s. In so many ways, then, this is very much your (grand)father's avant-garde.

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Nonetheless, the essays themselves are extremely enlightening, and include several new/recent analyses of work by more familiar figures (Joseph Cornell, Robert Florey, Mary Ellen Bute, J.S. Watson, Melville Webber, Sarah K. Arledge) and relative unknowns (Emlen Etting, Elizabeth Woodman Wright, Rutherford Boyd, *Ballet mécanique* composer George Antheil). Equally compelling, however, are reprinted pieces from artists and critics of the past—Watson, Robert Flaherty, Lewis Jacobs, Herman Weinberg, Henwar Rodakiewicz—that serve to remind us not only that filmmakers can often provide invaluable insights into their own work, but that the separation of avant-garde critic

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The scattered and largely provisional nature of the arguments contained in the book seems to stem largely from the author's well-placed conviction that Beat-ism was really a collection of paradoxes: its "aspirations towards aesthetic and spiritual purity" were offset by "opportunities for social and cultural influence"; seemingly radical cultural resistance was undermined by reactionary politics; the appearance of vanguard unity was belied by the reality that the central Beat writers "had so little in common" as to prompt Burroughs to deny that they were a group at all. What held the Beats together was actually something much looser, a "passionate search for unprecedented ways of living, communicating, thinking, and being," and, in his strongest essays, Sterritt pursues this search with appropriate invention and vigor, finding interesting ways of discussing Beat stylistics as functions of larger cultural rebellion.

Particularly suggestive is Sterritt's effort to couch such rebellion within a Bakhtinian framework: finding the carnivalesque in Beat attitudes toward the body and 1950s propriety offers a useful entry into the obsessions of Kerouac and Burroughs, while the "boisterousness and multiplicity" of the dialogic also helps to account for the confusion and ambivalence of Beat praxis. Yet while the resulting discussions of *Doctor Sax* and *Visions of Cody* are particularly inspired, Sterritt also tends to wander a little far afield, as when he uses Beat interest in movies (the latter novel's evocation of the Three Stooges, for instance) as a vehicle for a larger exploration of not simply the Rabelaisian grotesqueries and incongruities of popular culture, but the nature of cinema itself. The leap is justified insofar as it springs from associations that lie very much at the core of Beat culture, but Sterritt insists on pushing further, beyond textual explication, into the wilds of freestanding theory. The result is a penchant for suggestive but nonetheless enormous, and perhaps tenuous, claims such as "the realms of film and sound recording are populated by nothing but grotesque bodies, with polymorphous possibilities set free by their very disconnection from the physical world" and "the [Buddhist] states of *multiplicity* (the vast) and *singularity* (the immediate) within the cosmos . . . are echoed in cinema by the *diversity of images* within a classical film and the *unity of impression* that such a film attempts to convey within the spectator's consciousness." Such possibilities may be offered here within a spirit of Bakhtinian play, but are never really fully argued within appropriate aesthetic contexts.

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Storey, Mark. *Cinema au Naturel: A History of Nudist Film.* Oshkosh, WI: Naturist Education Foundation, 2003. $25.00. What hath Eric Schaefer wrought? In the years since his groundbreaking *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, others have followed his lead in exploring more obscure corners of cinema. Schaefer's explication of socially peripheral films has proved durable, and Mark Storey's *Cinema au Naturel* adapts the *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* model to write a history of one exploitation subset: the nudist film. From the outset, Storey makes clear his interest is in movies *about* nudity, as opposed to those that contain a great deal of it, although he tends to lose sight of this useful distinction in the latter half of the book.

Storey's opening chapters on the history of social nudism, its adherents, and their ambivalent relationship to motion pictures are his strongest. His introduction leaves no doubt that nudist organizations are as likely as any other to engage in petty in-fighting, which sets the stage for a discussion of how nudist camp owners in the 1930s were torn between using motion pictures to promote their lifestyle, and a fear of being duped by unscrupulous producers out to make a fast, titillating buck. From there, he uses Schaefer's definition of what constitutes an exploitation film to prove that yes, nudist films are that, but then settles into an interesting examination of the evolution of

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Instead, Sterritt allows himself to drift on when he could be slowing down and offering more substantial discussions of, say, the history of the cinema/dream analogy favored by Kerouac, or the relevance of Futurism and Dada (and modernism more generally) to Beat poetics. That the volume ends with a discussion of avant-garde filmmakers Paul Sharits and Hollis Frampton, and composers Alvin Lucier and Steve Reich—none of whom is commonly recognized as a Beat artist—is symptomatic of this book's strengths and weaknesses. There are interesting and provocative ideas here, certainly, but *Screening the Beats*' lack of a coherent larger argument, and its tendency to offer its provocations in the spirit of spontaneity and free invention, may honor the ideals of its heroes, but it ultimately compromises its own usefulness as criticism and theory.

—Greg Taylor

Storey, Mark. *Cinema au Naturel: A History of Nudist Film.* Oshkosh, WI: Naturist Education Foundation, 2003. $25.00. What hath Eric Schaefer wrought? In the years since his groundbreaking *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, others have followed his lead in exploring more obscure corners of cinema. Schaefer's explication of socially peripheral films has proved durable, and Mark Storey's *Cinema au Naturel* adapts the *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* model to write a history of one exploitation subset: the nudist film. From the outset, Storey makes clear his interest is in movies *about* nudity, as opposed to those that contain a great deal of it, although he tends to lose sight of this useful distinction in the latter half of the book.

Storey's opening chapters on the history of social nudism, its adherents, and their ambivalent relationship to motion pictures are his strongest. His introduction leaves no doubt that nudist organizations are as likely as any other to engage in petty in-fighting, which sets the stage for a discussion of how nudist camp owners in the 1930s were torn between using motion pictures to promote their lifestyle, and a fear of being duped by unscrupulous producers out to make a fast, titillating buck. From there, he uses Schaefer's definition of what constitutes an exploitation film to prove that yes, nudist films are that, but then settles into an interesting examination of the evolution of

these movies from the semi-anthropological bent of the 1930s through the "nudie-cuties" of the 1950s.

Storey devotes special attention to *Elysia, Valley of the Nude* (1933), which was produced by Bryan Foy, and *The Unashamed* (1938), the most remarkable of the early nudist films in that it has a fictional plot centering on an interracial relationship (with a tragic ending thrown in for good measure; this is clearly a film about which more should be written). Both films were shot at the same nudist camp in California, and Storey is careful to show that in neither case did the camp itself see much profit—in terms of money or reputation—from the exposure. Later, Storey indulges in lengthy explications of films such as *The Magic Glasses* (1953) and *Peter's Day in the Sun* (2000), but these are of considerably less interest.

A central theme of the book is the tension between what Storey sees as the evangelistic impulse of many naturist films, and the more leering, openly sexual approach seen in, for example, such Doris Wishman films as 1960's *Nude on the Moon* (given that nudism appears to be a primarily male activity, one wishes he might have commented more on Wishman's role in revitalizing the genre). His exploration of this dynamic is solid, at least until he addresses the state of contemporary nudist films, which have been rendered quaint by the advent of hardcore pornography. Storey spends the second half of the book gamely arguing that porn has stripped the nudist film—now video, almost exclusively—of its eroticism, leaving behind a form that, with few exceptions, is reliant on travelogs and documentaries that are hardly more than long-form advertising for the clothes-free experience.

As a practicing naturist himself, Storey becomes less a cultural historian and more an apostle in the latter half of *Cinema au Naturel*. His argument that nudist films have now become more substantive because of their advocacy is less than convincing, particularly when he encounters producers like Charlie Simonds, whose popular video series feature attractive, naked young women in a variety of exotic locales. In fact, none of the current filmmakers profiled by Storey seem especially anxious to highlight physical imperfections in their videos, which makes one think that the nudist film hasn't strayed as far from its roots in exploitation as the author believes.

Still, Storey deserves credit for not ducking the contradictions raised by Simonds and others, nor does he shy away from controversy over the presence of children in these videos. Although *Cinema au Naturel* tends to whipsaw from one era to another, and Storey relies far too much on lengthy, nearly scene-by-scene descriptions of the movies he discusses, there is more to his work—and to these films—than meets the eye.

—Mike Mashon